Commentary

Volume Sixty-seven, Number Five, May 1979

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William Barrett

Converting the Gentiles?
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Music: The State of the Art
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Books:
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Ellen Moers
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Commentary

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Letters from Readers

Political Change

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's three-part explanation for the continuing "schizophrenia of contemporary politics" ["American Politics, Then & Now," February] comes as a welcome addition to current interpretations of recent political developments. Mr. Wilson accounts for the peculiar combination of vigorous activity and sluggishness on the part of government by citing two modern political trends: first, the ease with which private concerns become public responsibilities and, second, the enhanced position accorded political ideas. Both of these trends are countered by a third, namely, the growing "atomization" of political institutions.

Actually, most of what Mr. Wilson describes in an often dispassionate analysis as policy extremes can be attributed to a less benign trend, namely, the casting aside of the spirit of compromise and accommodation on the part of political elites both in and out of government. How else can we account for a President who talks of waging the moral equivalent of war while sending legislation to the Congress in comprehensive "packages"; a UN Ambassador who brands even the more moderate elements in Rhodesia as "neo-fascist"; or "consumer-minded" Senators who refuse to allow a crucial energy measure to be brought to a vote?

Perhaps it is no accident that institutional development has followed the lines of political rhetoric, with those least suited (or interested) in the give-and-take of political accommodation now in the forefront of public policy-making—the courts, the media, and various one-dimensional regulatory bodies. Similarly, those congressional and party leaders serving in roles that have traditionally emphasized compromise and adjustment have found their voices, not to mention prerogatives, stifled.

In short, what we are witnessing today is the coming of age of a generation of "leaders" who regard compromise as, at best, unnecessary, and, at worst, an evil to be avoided at all costs. And it is not an attitude exclusively attributable to the "New Class" of well-educated professionals, who, it should be added, often applaud others who have taken their lead. (In a college seminar which I currently teach on policy-making in Washington, the students were virtually unanimous in regarding the recent farmers' disruption of business in the nation's capital as a legitimate means of airing grievances.)

Political purity in a time of relative economic prosperity and international tranquility may be a luxury that our political system can afford. But the essential question we face in the years ahead is whether or not our leaders can be persuaded to resist the demands of those who are insensitive to the need for political adjustments essential for governing a complex and diverse society.

DAVID E. LOWE
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Do the changes in the American regime described by James Q. Wilson amount to a fundamental change in the system of governance? After a decade during which proclamations of mini-revolutions in family relations, legal relations, race relations, etc. became common, perhaps it was inevitable that someone besides Jean-François Revel would wonder whether these amounted to a real revolution. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that someone of learning, moderation, and respectability raises this question.

The moral of Mr. Wilson's story is that ideas are supremely powerful. I would add that, in politics, ideas of legitimacy are the powerful ones. Therefore, it is strange that Mr. Wilson passes so lightly over the falling of the "legitimacy barrier" in congressional politics: apparently Congressmen no longer consider whether they have political, constitutional, or legal authority for their action. Mr. Wilson's "cost-benefit" analysis of this massive change of public opinion seems too casual, especially if one considers that the lack of reverence for legitimacy is characteristic of tyrants. Or does Mr. Wilson mean that Congressmen keep their ideas of right and wrong to themselves because they know that a public defense of those ideas would ruin them politically?

There is a second, related consideration. The typical form of rule established as the legitimacy barrier falls is centralized administration. Thus, increasingly, social conflicts

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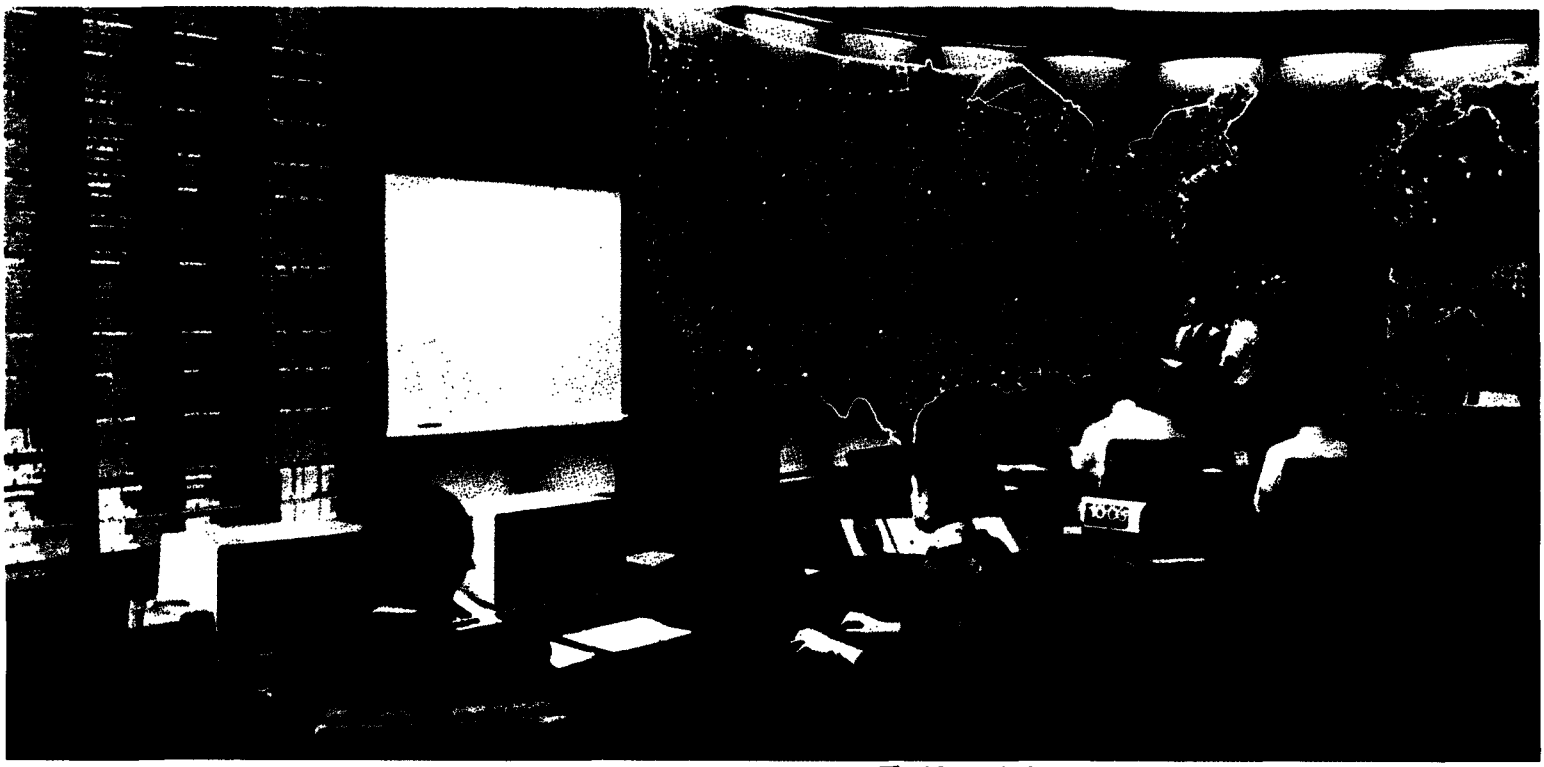

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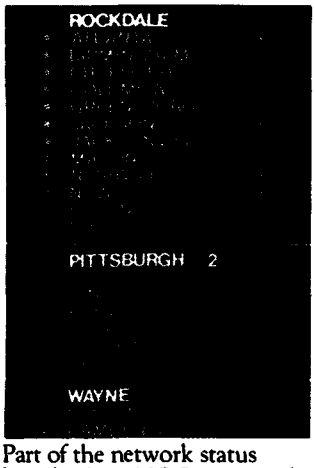

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are resolved privately through negotiations over administrative regulations: not in Congress, and not in the parties. The function of Congressmen changes accordingly. As Morris Fiorina has shown, they are elected to be ombudsmen, not legislators.

Tocqueville argued that such consolidations of centralized government with centralized administration are the greatest threats to personal and political liberty. But such consolidations would require the support of public opinion to be established securely. Does Mr. Wilson agree? If he does, aren't the stakes in contemporary politics higher than his article implies?

JOHN A. WETTERGREEN
San Jose State University
San Jose, California

JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

John A. Wettergreen may be correct; I suspect that he is; but I do not know it. The role of Congress in the modern era of the presumptively omnicompetent state has not been studied. In my current research on the politics of regulation, I am struck both by the lack of attention (not to say lack of courage) characteristic of congressional attitudes toward the bureaucracy and by the rise of new ideas (such as the deregulation movement) that challenge the principles of bureaucratic rule. Congress currently has the best of both worlds: it denounces bureaucracy in the abstract and ignores it in practice. I believe Morris Fiorina exaggerates the favor-doing role of Congress, at least with respect to regulatory affairs. (That Congress wishes to *appear* to be an ombudsman is beyond dispute.) In striking this pose, Congress is doing precisely what public opinion requires. If that is the case, it is public opinion that supports centralized administration and its attendant threats to liberty. Does Mr. Wettergreen agree?

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Judaism & Revision

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The problem with Cynthia Ozick's analysis of Harold Bloom's literary criticism ["Judaism & Harold Bloom," January] is that she herself is a victim of the idol-making she imputes to Bloom and to modernity. Her rigid puritanical stance reifies the tradition into an idol. Beneath her contorted argumentation lies a great oversimplification of cultural history. She states: "Like Terach, like Freud, like Marx, like the Gnostics, like classical Christian theologians who are the inheritors of the Gnostics, like the Kabbalists and the Hasidim who are similarly the inheritors of the Gnostics, like all of these, the Bloomian scheme of misprision of the precursor is tainted by a variety of idol-making."

The Baal Shem Tov taught: "You shall not make any graven image . . . not even the Torah shall be a graven image." What the modern mentality (including for our purposes the Baal Shem) would vigorously assert is that the past, indeed all pasts, needs to be constantly challenged because it sets up tradition and continuity as a rigid suit of mail that would prevent the person within from growing, and eventually would cause him to cease breathing altogether.

I have read little of Bloom. I do not know whether Bloom consciously or unconsciously makes poetry into an idol, or whether this is Miss Ozick's creative misreading of Bloom's poetics. But even if her reading of Bloom is correct, and poems are in fact "no good at all in urging the moral life," Miss Ozick's view of Judaism is extremely narrow and historically inaccurate. Judaism is not and never has been exclusively concerned with the *moral* life. There is a long, priestly heritage (challenged, to be sure, by the prophets, but nonetheless part of Judaism). There are the mystical flights of the *merkavah* practiced by so great a luminary as Rabbi Akiva himself.

If anything, there is an underlying authoritarianism—not morality—permeating biblical and rabbinic literature. The Talmud continues the priestly emphasis on the exact performance of rituals. God is seldom mentioned in these pages, although His presence is assumed. But the concentration on correct performance to satisfy the law is itself, as Freud knew, a kind of obsession verging on idol-making.

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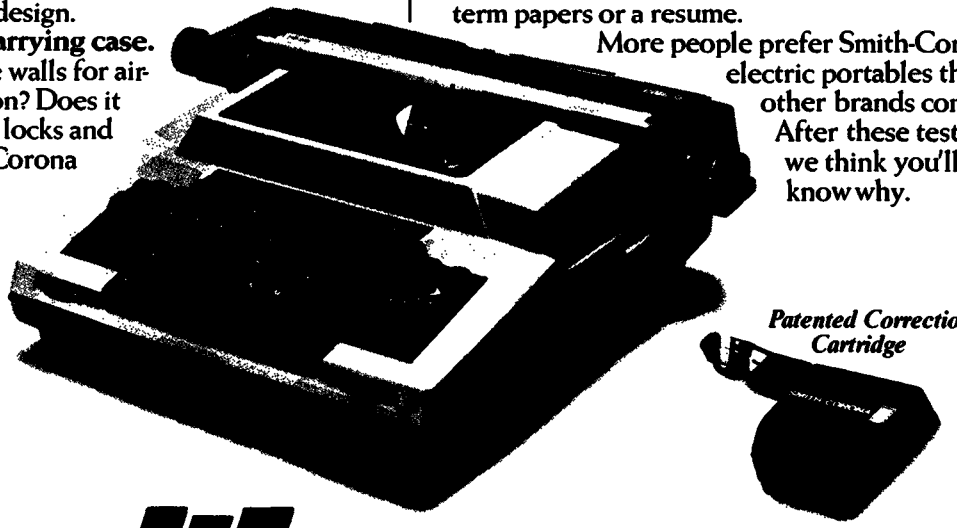

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What else will account for the rabbis' hatred of the *am ha-aretz*, the untutored commoner who was not exacting in his tithes? Was this hatred of those Jews who did not practice the ritual in an exacting manner really submission to the will of God? The fact of the matter is that the second commandment prohibiting images was disobeyed in spirit, if not in practice, by the elevation of the word to the authoritative and authoritarian place that it has almost always held in traditional Judaism.

Many of the so-called modern, i.e., Oedipal, attempts at revisioning, are attempts at cutting through the baggage of the past which has so often turned the imaginative and obsessive forays of the ancients into idols. Again, to quote the Baal Shem, "We say: 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,' for Isaac and Jacob did not base their work on the searching and service of Abraham; they themselves searched for the unity of the Maker and his service" (Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim, Early Masters*). The search is for the living presence, for new epiphanies: and the poet is thus in quest of a face of the divine, even when he is entranced by the images with which he clothes his insight. And this is so even when he does not use theological language to describe the wonder, tragedy, and mystery of existence.

Miss Ozick is unaware of the historical function of Midrash as a process for regeneration. The Bible was kept alive only because it was creatively misread throughout Jewish history. Often the original intent of the words of the text (even the words of God Himself) was turned on its head by minds seeking a place for new insight. There is a statement somewhere in the Talmud which quotes a rabbi criticized for his legal innovations as saying something to the effect that, "As my teacher made room for himself, so I make room for myself." In this sense, the Kabbalists were only continuing and enlarging a tradition that they inherited from classical rabbinic Judaism. But this tradition goes back to the Bible itself. What does Jeremiah mean when he says, "This is what the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, says: 'You can add your burnt-offerings to your other sacrifices, and eat the flesh yourselves! When I brought your fathers from the land of Egypt, I said nothing to them, I gave them no orders, about burnt-offerings or sacrifices . . .' (7:21-22). Was not the prophetic challenge to the priests and kings a form of misprision, and the prophets' reading of Jewish history a creative misreading?

BURT JACOBSON
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Imagine. Here's Harold Bloom, Orthodox in background himself, separating the poet's creation from any relationship with God's creation. Poetry has nothing to do with reality, much less with morality, he says, only with words, with past artistic images. But he may be relenting a bit, and in any case here's Cynthia Ozick, calling Bloom anti-Judaic. And not only Bloom but the Kabbalists, the Hasidim, Gershom Scholem. (What a long list she must have.) For Miss Ozick the choice is between not violating a single letter of the Torah and making idols—no other possibilities, no possible tension. There is no belatedness in her Judaism, she says, just that we are here only to recapture without revision what was spoken thousands of years ago. No direct contact with a living God for us. No literature in the service of God. (Science is apparently OK. It doesn't require imagination. Talmud? It's not interpretation.) Morality blooms in artless air, nurtured only by the strictest obedience to tradition. Everyone knows that all normative Jews are better than any poet. Between articles for COMMENTARY, Miss Ozick works on her current novel—which deals with that oxymoron, the Jewish writer.

EUGENE S. MORNELL
Potomac, Maryland

CYNTHIA OZICK writes:

These letters—one solemn and superior, one cheerful and satiric—are alike in their assumption that later is always better, that whatever has already been thought and said is in every case in need of updating, and that the past, simply by virtue of its *being* past, has no creative power on its own.

Burt Jacobson attempts to respond to an essay about Harold Bloom's ideas while confessing that he has "read little of Bloom." That is perhaps not the best equipment for advocacy, and not the best invitation for us to put confidence in the superiority of his "awareness."

For instance, Mr. Jacobson, in an angry paragraph (angry at Talmud), characterizes "the [rabbinic] concentration on correct performance" as being, "as Freud knew, a kind of obsession verging on idol-making." (The appeal to Freud shows us that Mr. Jacobson, modern man that he is, does not yet stand in the world altogether without a rabbi of his own.) But I think Jacob Neusner's portrayal (in *Invitation to the Talmud*, Harper & Row, 1976) of "the open-ended character of the talmudic argument" is more temperate:

> Now its very contemporary pertinence becomes clear. Since one expects no final solutions, man is prepared for a succession of intermediate, provisional ones. He learns, therefore, the discipline of commitment within open-mindedness, the capacity to hold conviction loosely, to refrain from imposing on the other person the task of verifying, by assenting to, one's own deeply held convictions. It is the undogmatic quality of talmudic discourse which contemporary men might well learn to emulate. They will do so when their commitment is to method, rather than to its results, and when the method, or mode, of thought recovers the form prefigured in the Talmud: above all, skepticism, criticism, easy and free movement.

Freud's authority notwithstanding, this is somewhat different from "obsession verging on idol-making."

If there *is* an obsession verging on idol-making at hand, however, perhaps it is the self-serving and self-indulgent modern need for "growth." The enemy of "growth" is, of course, history. "What the modern mentality would vigorously assert," says Mr. Jacobson, "is that the past, indeed all pasts . . . would prevent the person within from growing"—that is, if not fiddled with and brought up to date to accommodate the newest epiphany.

Modernism's oddest gullibility—its fundamental dogma, the darkest sign of its profound failure of imaginative power—is the belief that distance brings unreality, that the form of an idea or ideal discovered or revealed in history has no present psychological or metaphysical validity (and therefore must be "revisioned"), and, especially, that to come afterward means to surpass. And if "modern" also means, as Mr. Jacobson says it does, "Oedipal attempts at revisioning," then the remarks of both letter writers are truly in the modern spirit—they exhibit malaise in the face of clarity, uneasiness at seeing a position taken (and defended),

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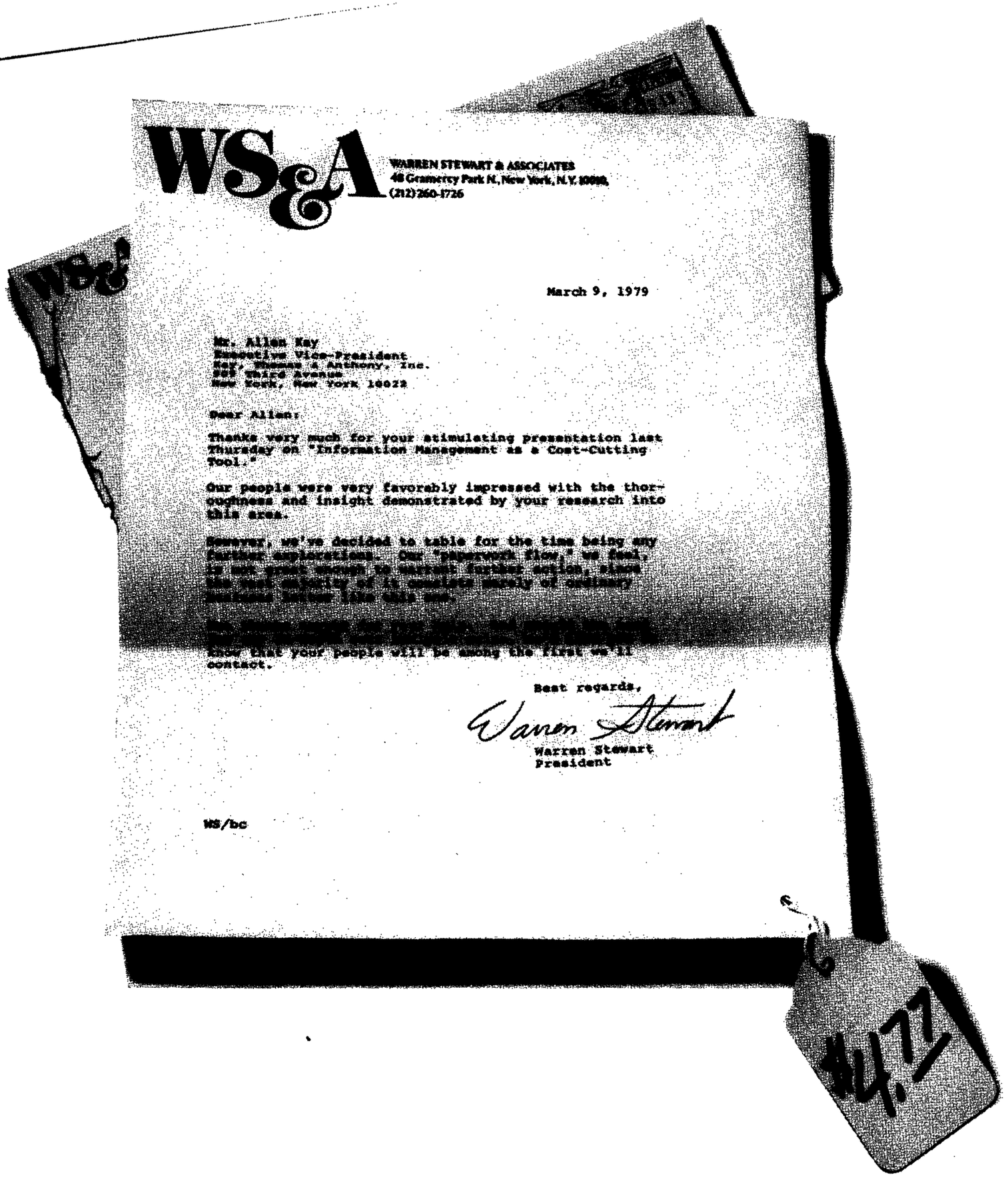

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distress over watching a judgment in formation, unhappiness in observing an argument come to fruition. How much easier it is to "grow"!

A critical position summarizing Judaism's steadfast and lucid point of view, its most succinct conviction—i.e., that Torah is consistently anti-idolatry—is described (by Eugene S. Mornell) as having "no possible tension," and (by Mr. Jacobson) as "oversimplification," a "rigid puritanical stance." The modernist Mr. Jacobson further detects in that view support for "the baggage of the past," "tradition and continuity as a rigid suit of mail." He denigrates Talmud in favor of the prophets, to whom he attributes "creative misreading." But the prophets did not revise—they reminded. They did not surpass—they returned. They formulated a mode of return, of refreshment of the Sinaitic hallowing (as Mr. Jacobson's own quotation from Jeremiah forcefully confirms).

But "modernity" of this kind—demanding flux, complexity, tension, paradox, cultural breadth as opposed to "narrowness"—is much, much older than "modern times." For the "tension" he praises, let Mr. Mornell go to the Trinity: plenty of tension there, and a quantity of dialectics to boot. For "new epiphanies," and especially for complexity, let Mr. Jacobson go to Hinduism: the plethora of divinities, their relationship with one another and mystically with their worshippers, should satisfy his impatience with my "great oversimplification of cultural history." But it is not necessary to stray so far to oblige Mr. Jacobson's intellectual pleasure in the "challenges" of the "modern mentality," or in "Oedipal attempts at revisioning." For "cutting through the baggage of the past," let Mr. Jacobson look at the course of the Karaite movement, and see where Judaism landed without Talmud. (The Karaites made up new commentaries, a thousandfold more "rigid" than the Talmud they despised, and ended, as everyone knows, by sitting in the dark on the Sabbath.) Finally, for throwing off a "rigid puritanical stance," and especially for "continuing and enlarging" tradition, let Mr. Jacobson follow the Kabbalists into their historical flowering—the Oedipal and unpuritanical revisioning of the Frankists.

In my essay I spoke of the unrestrained imagination, what Yehuda Halevi, thinking of the Greeks, called "flowers without fruit." I did not speak of Mr. Mornell's "literature in the service of God." In that category I would include Thomas Mann, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Tolstoy; and I would include Midrash and Talmud. But that is another essay.

Schools & Society

To the Editor of Commentary:

Rita Kramer's review of my book, *Worlds Apart* [Books in Review, January], was an outrage. First, I would suggest that she read the *entire* book before beginning her uninformed tirade—this time with a more intelligent and responsible vision and voice. Mrs. Kramer begins by accusing me of a biased and prejudicial perspective, but her entire review selects pieces of my book out of context and shapes them to match her angry obsessions.

First, Mrs. Kramer claims that I have bought the revisionist rhetoric asserting that schools are vehicles of oppression and repressive instruments of society. The passage she quotes from my book to prove her point was a paraphrase of views expressed by Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America,* not a "doctrinaire" theme of my book. If Mrs. Kramer had read as far as the fourth or fifth chapter of *Worlds Apart,* she would have found a very extensive discussion of some of the socio-historical and contemporary interpretations of the "real" purposes of school. More importantly, she would have found that I do not take as "axiomatic the assumptions" of the revisionists, but offer critical perspectives on a range of competing historical interpretations—one being the efforts and success on the part of immigrant and minority groups to transform and shape social institutions, not merely respond to an established, static order.

Mrs. Kramer follows with a complaint that I ignore the importance of the early development of children in families before they reach school; that I believe that "everything crucial to a child's progress in school happens once he is already there." Here I am absolutely baffled by the reviewer's misrepresentation, for one of my primary reasons for writing this book was to underscore the profound and deeply etched learnings that occur in families before formal schooling. Anna Freud's important work on the subject is not forgotten by me. Once again, if Mrs. Kramer had read as far as Chapter III she would have found that Anna Freud is central to my discussion and analysis of the differentiated roles of mothers and teachers in the lives of young children. In fact, in *Worlds Apart* I recite a litany that continually refers to families as the primary educators.

If families have such a crucial function in shaping the development of young children, it follows that schools must recognize their critical role and find effective ways of building bridges between the two environments. This does not mean, as Mrs. Kramer suggests, that I ignore the early socialization of children, nor do I believe that learning in schools should be imitative of or merely reactive to familial learning. I argue that some level of conflict between families and schools is inevitable in a changing society where families and schools have different socio-cultural functions and that some institutional distance and discontinuity is important for the autonomous growth and expression of young children.

The recognition of the need for a sense of continuity and the productive uses of conflict are particularly important for schools and families in poor and minority communities. Here I do not claim that reading and writing are part of the "dominant white culture," and, therefore, should not be bought into by blacks. (Did Mrs. Kramer miss the long chapter on black families where I describe the passionate dreams blacks have always attached to education as a vehicle of liberation and the extreme importance black parents give to traditional forms of schooling that emphasize academic skills and training?) Rather, I argue that in order to teach black children more effectively, children whom most schools have failed abysmally, teachers must find pedagogical strategies and interactional modes, and build relationships with families and communities that support the learning of skills and the enhancement of self-image. I do not see the intellectual, social, and psychological spheres of the child's learning as distinct and separate. They are part of a whole. Interestingly, Mrs. Kramer responds to these suggestions for the restructuring of educational institutions as necessarily

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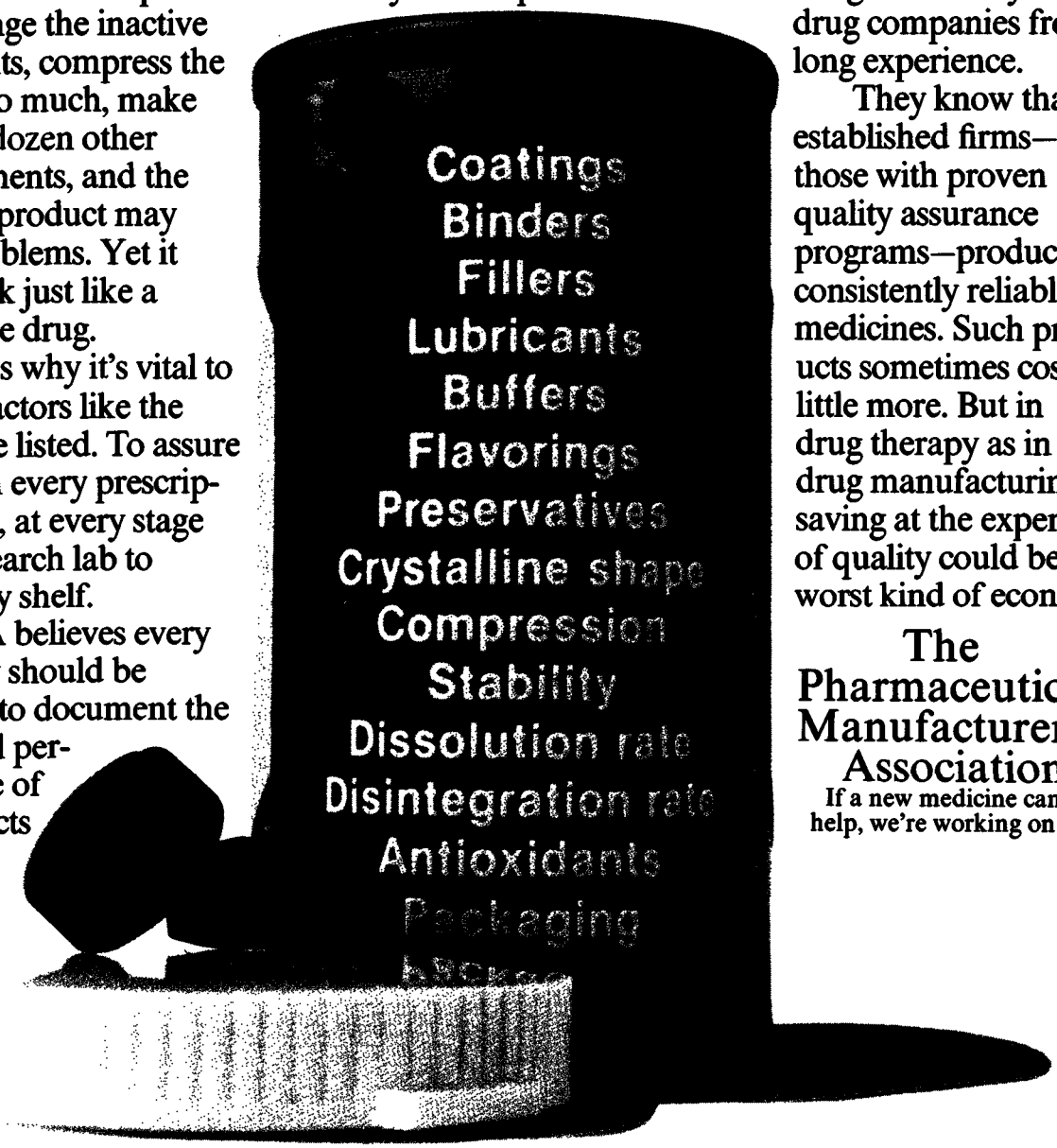

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ONCE IN A GREAT WHILE an artist appears whose work is not only beautiful and utterly original, but whose vision seems uniquely suited to the taste of a particular audience of art lovers. Just such a happy conjunction has occurred in the case of the young American artist David Bennett, from whom the editors of COMMENTARY have commissioned this strikingly brilliant original print. Two hundred impressions have been made. One of them has been presented to the Jewish Museum in New York, where it now forms a part of the permanent collection. The plates have been destroyed, and no more impressions will ever be executed.

THE WORK The venerable patriarch Jacob is captured at the moment of bestowing his precious gift, the coat of many colors, on the child of old age whom he loved, as the Bible says, "more than any other of his sons." At the center, Joseph the dreamer looms monumentally as his older brothers look on in distress and envy and his father wraps the legendary robe around him.

THE TECHNIQUE In this linoleum cut, the artist has utilized a highly decorative style with simplified forms expressed in bright, flat colors. Never has the coat of many colors appeared so rainbow-like or breathtakingly vivid. By limiting himself to the three primary colors of red, blue, and yellow, juxtaposing and surprinting to explore their potential for richness and contrast, the artist has achieved a technical tour-de-force in which surface brilliance and depth of feeling combine to produce a work of sinuous beauty.

THE ARTIST David Bennett is a rare phenomenon. He is an American whose initial recognition has been earned abroad, and whose acclaim has turned largely on his sensitive and profound handling of religious subjects. Since his first one-man exhibition at the Galerie Delfs in Munich in 1974, his work has been seen and repeatedly applauded throughout Western Europe. A typical European review extols the jewel-like effect of his work; another compares him to Chagall "in his ability to free biblical representations from crusty traditions and present them anew." Bennett's first American one-man exhibition will open next fall at the Maurice Spertus Museum in Chicago, and will travel from there to the Judah L. Magnes Museum in San Francisco, the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles, and the Jewish Museum in New York, among others.

THE EDITION A limited edition of two hundred impressions of *Joseph's Coat of Many Colors* has been executed in Europe by the firm of George Andor, and these, signed and numbered by the artist, have been handsomely framed in New York City at the Gallery of Graphic Arts. The 17"x20½" printed image has been matted to 25"x30". In a gold-toned metal frame, with all-rag white mat, *Joseph's Coat of Many Colors* is a work of enduring artistic value.

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adapting to "the limitations of the very people who have the most to gain from being brought into the mainstream of society." I see them as attempts to articulate the consonant values that are shared by black families and schools about the value of learning and an effort to recognize and support the growth of black children in all of the enduring environments where learning takes place.

I could go on. It does seem senseless, however, to respond to individual points of distortion and obfuscation on the part of Mrs. Kramer because it is her tone and her ideology that are most distressing and that pervade the discussion, limiting her clear vision of *Worlds Apart*. I find it very interesting that Mrs. Kramer is preoccupied with "racism" when I studiously avoid such charges in my book—choosing rather to describe institutions and individuals in more complex, subtle terms. Happily, Mrs. Kramer does not have a prominent seat on the boards of the institutions and granting agencies that she charges with misconduct in supporting my research and writing. If she did, I fear she would choose people who would be mere reproductions of Rita Kramer.

SARA LAWRENCE LIGHTFOOT
Harvard University
Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, Massachusetts

RITA KRAMER writes:

Like most authors, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot would wish her book to be judged by her intentions, but like all reviewers, I was limited to evaluating her book strictly in terms of its content. Unhappily, Mrs. Lightfoot's letter is not a faithful representation of the book itself.

If Mrs. Lightfoot has any disagreement with her paraphrase of Bowles and Gintis ("In actuality, American schooling was [and is] a mechanism of social control"), it is not apparent in her writing. The passage is quite consistent with many similar statements of Mrs. Lightfoot's own, such as her characterization of American schools as "social and economic vehicles of oppression and denial" (p. 125).

Mrs. Lightfoot claims to show the mutual responsibility of families and school, but her actual position is to credit families with a "passionate commitment to learning" that is sabotaged by the school system, which alone she blames for creating "casualties and failures." Nothing is said about the effects of disorganized, rejecting families, but on pp. 206-7 of *Worlds Apart* Mrs. Lightfoot writes that "schools displace the origins of failure onto families" and criticizes educators for "searching out the origins of pathology beyond the school walls." It is the school, in her words, "that needs to be restructured and changed."

Mrs. Lightfoot claims that Anna Freud is "central" to her discussion, yet she quotes her only on peripheral issues like the teacher's role, not on issues basic to Anna Freud's work, such as the development of ego strengths, the question of how children develop the psychological capacity to learn. Mrs. Lightfoot demonstrates no understanding of Anna Freud's contributions to the study of normal and abnormal development or of its implications. What follows from what we know about the influence of early childhood experience on the capacity to love and to learn suggests not just that schools should be different but that some kinds of family life should also be different, not just that the schools, necessarily limited institutions at best, have "failed abysmally," but that we have to find ways of lessening the kinds of deprivation, social and emotional, that predispose children to learning difficulties of various kinds before they even come to school. On this subject Mrs. Lightfoot has nothing to say.

Mrs. Lightfoot says that she has studiously avoided charges of racism in her book. Yet after telling us that "researchers have created theoretical and methodological strategies that have given scientific validity to racist assumptions" (p. 155) and referring to "the discriminatory visions of social scientists eager to justify the unequal nature of society" (p. 167), she characterizes the position of Daniel P. Moynihan as "racist" (p. 168) and that of James Conant as "prejudicial" (p. 195). In Mrs. Lightfoot's discussion, fragmented families and street violence are treated not as observable social realities to be understood in order to be dealt with, but as mental constructs of malevolent social scientists.

Rather than the "complex, subtle" discussion she sees in her own work, Mrs. Lightfoot's book offers at its best a few platitudes (the need for understanding and cooperation between parents and teachers), often stated in awkward and pretentious jargon ("This volume begins to record some of the complex dimensions of family-school intersection by recognizing both the consonant and dissonant faces of the relationship and by exploring some of the microscopic, interpersonal dynamics as well as the more macroscopic, structural patterns of interaction").

If indeed the schools have failed abysmally with some children, perhaps it is because they were expected to accomplish something they could not possibly do—to reverse the effects of impoverishment at an early age at home.

Of course schools should be criticized whenever they fail to fulfill their responsibilities, but a balanced and scholarly analysis also requires that family and community share the responsibility for children who have been deprived of affection and nurture. Their emotional scars, the residue of wounds inflicted in infancy and early childhood, may appear in school as lack of motivation, apathy, and aggressiveness, but there is no doubt that these are merely symptoms whose causes often lie outside the school. Surely Mrs. Lightfoot knows that her call to restructure the schools will be of little help to those children who need help.

Auden

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As one who was profoundly affected at the time by Auden's poetry of the late 30's, especially his "Spain," only to experience a diametric reversal of political views (at the time of, and probably somewhat prior to, reading Gide's *Retour de l'URSS*), I would have appreciated Bernard McCabe's article, "'Necessary Murder': Spender & Auden in the 30's" [February], even more if Auden's political philosophy had been brought up to date just before his death. This would, it strikes me, have entailed some reference to his published viewpoint on American involvement in Vietnam. May one refer to *Authors Takes Sides on Vietnam* (Simon & Schuster, 1967), in which Auden is quoted (in part) as follows: ". . . It goes without saying that war is an atrocious corrupting business, but it is dishonest of those who demand the immediate withdrawal of all American troops to pretend that their motives are purely humanitarian. They believe,

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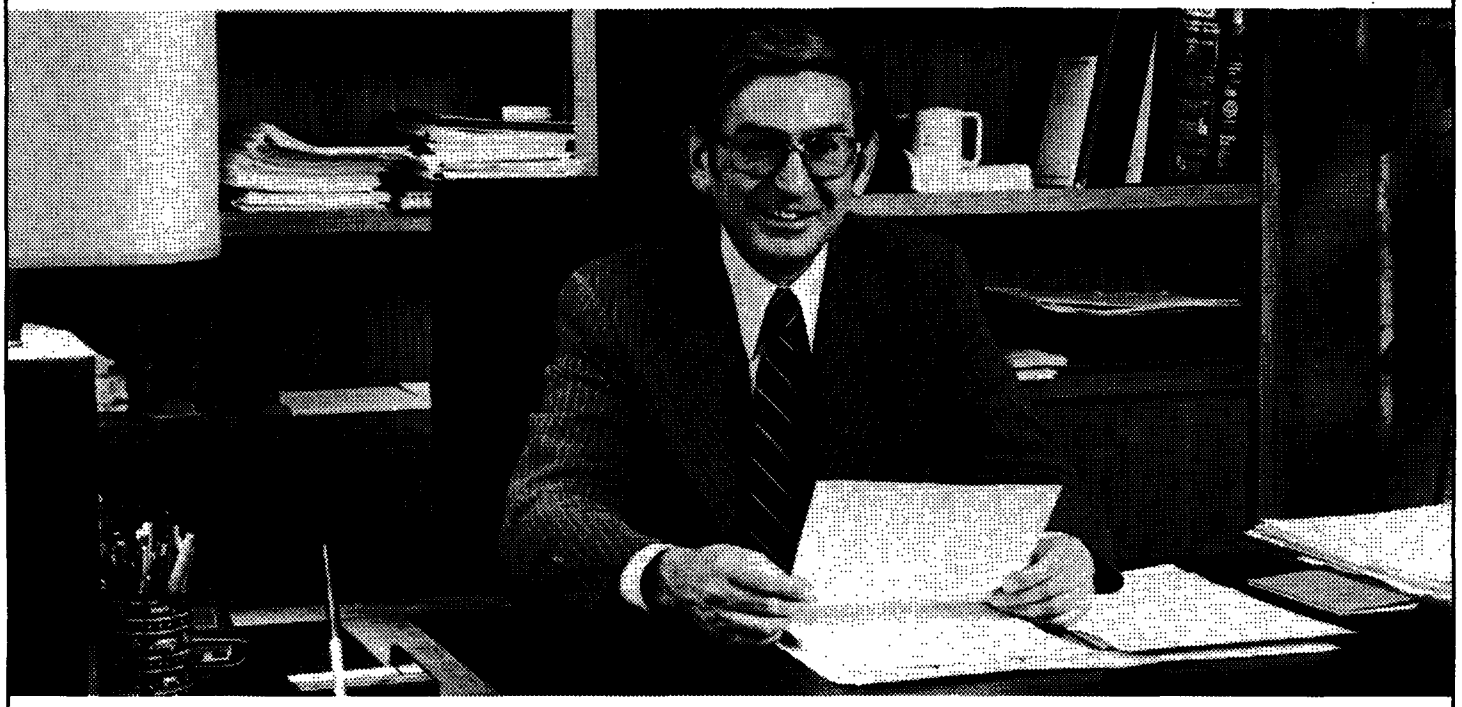

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rightly or wrongly, that it would be better if the Communists won. . . . I believe a negotiated peace, to which the Vietcong will have to be a party, to be possible, but not yet, and that, therefore, American troops, alas, must stay in Vietnam until it is. . . ."

JOHN HASTINGS
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Bernard McCabe's article on Spender, Auden, and Day Lewis is superb. . . . Perhaps he overstressed their "violence," but in quoting Orwell he should have gone on to the next sentence from "Inside the Whale": "Mr. Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled."

DAVID WILSON
New York City

Pluralism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

If, as Milton Himmelfarb ["Pluralism Ancient and Modern," December 1978] concludes, there is "time enough to be hoity-toity about democracy and pluralism when the Messiah comes," then why should he be concerned about what the ancients taught about pluralism? If pluralism is so simple a choice, why has he created such a complex defense of it? To begin to interpret Mr. Himmelfarb's intent we must observe initially that his article expresses plural views of pluralism in plural voices. The article is far more artful than his concluding phrase would suggest; he is not didactic in a formal way. Here, form follows content. If what he says at the end is not *his* conclusion, then the end of the article may not be Mr. Himmelfarb's final word. The reader must search for that, however, in much the same way one must search for the arguments of the ancients in contemporary discourse.

The reason such a search should be undertaken is that the final word answers two practical questions: should the Jews be pluralists? and if so, on what grounds? Mr. Himmelfarb discloses that there are many contemporary arbiters of good taste (as Petronius called the Censors), who have either ignored pluralism or condemned it as conservative and non-rational; yet he also shows us that because Jews

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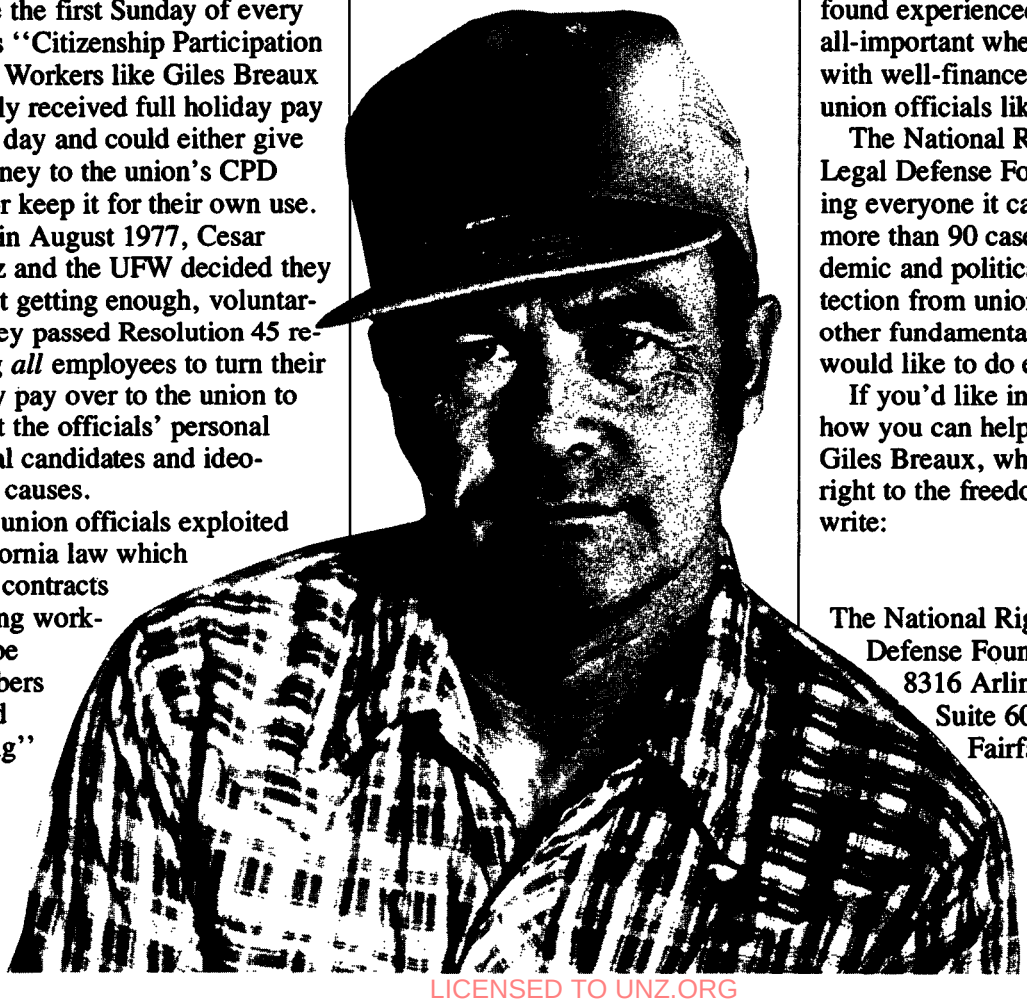
UFW contracts with employers reserve the first Sunday of every June as "Citizenship Participation Day." Workers like Giles Breaux formerly received full holiday pay for the day and could either give the money to the union's CPD Fund or keep it for their own use.

But in August 1977, Cesar Chavez and the UFW decided they weren't getting enough, voluntarily. They passed Resolution 45 requiring *all* employees to turn their holiday pay over to the union to support the officials' personal political candidates and ideological causes.

The union officials exploited a California law which allows contracts requiring workers to be "members in good standing" of a union to keep their jobs. And the union is the sole judge of a "good" member.

The UFW warned Giles Breaux to turn over his holiday pay or run the risk of being declared a member not in good standing. Breaux's answer was to the point: "I have a right to do what I want to with my money." He refused to pay up, and was immediately threatened with being fired.

That's when the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation stepped in and filed suit on behalf of Breaux and 11 other members of the UFW. The Chavez union was charged with oppression, fraud, malice, and violation of the workers' constitutional rights. The suit also asked the court to strike down the California law that allows the union to have absolute power over workers by requiring full union membership as a condition of employment.



Giles Breaux was fortunate. He found experienced legal help—all-important when you're dealing with well-financed power-hungry union officials like Cesar Chavez.

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation is helping everyone it can—currently in more than 90 cases involving academic and political freedom, protection from union violence, and other fundamental rights. But it would like to do even more.

If you'd like information on how you can help workers like Giles Breaux, who says, "I have a right to the freedom I fought for," write:

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may have zealously defended pluralism in America this has not kept us immune from attack, even by some of our traditional allies in this matter. Perhaps we must begin to see that by presupposing that all groups can live together within a framework of mutual toleration, pluralists in our time have ignored an important ancient teaching: the desire for "empire" is a natural element of pluralism in political life. Witness the debates generated today over the issue of affirmative action, or, more significantly, the battles being waged over "being Jewish." No contemporary answer can be provided to the question of Jewish pluralism that is immune from skepticism.

The ancient answer to the question was constructed on the simple observation that a universal Jewish empire was not possible, at least in this life. Classical Judaism accepted pluralism grudgingly; it did not approve of it. What made it tolerable was a faith in transhistorical truth about the true God, who rules in spite of differing opinions about gods. Classical Judaism is not simply monist; it is metaphysically monist, but politically pluralist. Is this not the teaching of the story of Babel? In the end of days there will be no politics. That is all we know.

Did a change in the status of pluralism come about when faith in God's presence in history was called into question? It would appear that the issue is perhaps more serious than merely a change in status. The ancient tradition is in danger of being totally forgotten in our times, through a process of reinterpretation. Today pluralism is defended from the point of view of secularism. Modern pluralists behave toward the tradition in much the same way that anti-pluralists act toward pluralism—viewing it negatively when viewing it at all. Who today will be the equivalent of a Rashi or Ibn Ezra, struggling with the meaning of God's words and deeds? Who today will find the story of Babel such a mystery? Our tradition is being distorted and lost through the systematic studies of rabbis posing as historians or sociologists and sociologists and historians posing as rabbis.

If I have interpreted Mr. Himmelfarm correctly, he has concerned himself with pluralism as understood by the ancients because he has come to recognize that modern pluralists and their critics are more concerned with their logically consistent systems of thought about the good society than the actual tensions inherent in every humanly devised order that make the Heavenly City impossible. Both pluralists and their critics are, in this sense, idealists or utopians. Thanks to Mr. Himmelfarb we are sensitized to the possibility that classical Judaism, with its faith in a living God and a Messiah, is the true empiricism upon which we can depend for a correct understanding of political life. Out of concern for the various ways in which our survival is at stake today, we have reason to recall the principles upon which pluralism can be defended empirically, even if contemporary pluralists do not find traditionalists tolerable.

MARTIN J. PLAX

Cleveland, Ohio

Liberty & Intervention

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Marc F. Plattner's review of *A Time for Truth* by William E. Simon [Books in Review, February] is typical of a certain approach to politics that has led America toward the loss of its distinctive and extremely valuable political character. He attributes to Simon a thesis that is quite simple—namely, that the loss of liberty must lead to a loss of wealth. But he admits that Simon really does advance "a slightly more sophisticated argument—namely, that once a nation begins heading down the road of government intervention in the economy, a political and psychological dynamic takes hold that leads to ever greater encroachments on the private sector."

Yet the simple and the more sophisticated arguments are not very different. The "must" in Simon's simple argument need not be interpreted as a historical or logical necessity—as with all such musts in human affairs, it means that *if* trends continue consistent with the practice of government intervention, *then* there will be a loss of wealth. Mr. Plattner's reply is that if we refuse to be consistent with our recent past of growing government intervention, then we can avoid the results Simon says follow from such patterns. But anyone who has ever been involved in theoretical and practical discussions about what government should or should not do next knows that putting the brakes on government intervention is unjustifiable in any rational manner if one grants the soundness of the principles that guided government in the past.

Intervention has been advocated on the basis of certain modern liberal welfare-statist principles which can only be countered with alternative principles, not by an *ad hoc* desire to put a halt to intervention in a particular instance. Simon believes, as do many others—some of whom have argued the point in less popular books which never get reviewed because they are too sophisticated to make the best-seller list—that the modern liberal welfare-statist dogma needs to be challenged philosophically, on the basis of *moral principles* (which Mr. Plattner so disdainfully dismisses) that would give support to a free system. This system is not going to guarantee growth, of course, since freedom is only the necessary, not the sufficient, condition for prosperity. But from "careful and undogmatic thinking about" the past we learn that as a system—and that is what the debate is about, not about piecemeal policy—the society that adheres more and more to liberty gives rise to greater and greater prosperity.

It is very annoying to have Mr. Plattner pass himself off as an enemy of dogmatism (vs. William Simon, who, he implies, is dogmatic) when in fact he clings to the dogma—i.e., the unargued firm belief—that the pragmatic approach to politics can ever be a satisfactory solution to the wholesale malaise in which we find ourselves at the present time.

TIBOR MACHAN

Santa Barbara, California

MARC F. PLATTNER writes:

If I have rightly discerned the main point of Tibor Machan's confusing letter, he is accusing me of being a dogmatic pragmatist who is heedless of all moral principles. I find it rather presumptuous—not to say uncharitable—of Mr. Machan to conclude that I am unprincipled simply because I do not share *his* principles.

Mr. Machan also seems to suggest that the only "rational manner" in which one can oppose particular acts of government "intervention" is to oppose the principle of government intervention as such. If this is really what he means to say, he is talking nonsense. One can with perfect rationality acknowl-

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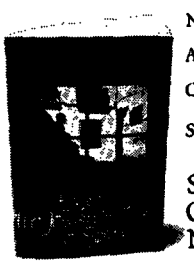

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edge that certain government policies would be morally permissible, yet oppose them because their economic, political, or social costs would outweigh their benefits. But perhaps Mr. Machan merely means to say that opponents of further government growth would be more *politically effective* if they based their opposition on strict libertarian principles. This might well be true if those principles were persuasive. The American public, however, does not seem to be persuaded by them, and neither am I. That of course is the ultimate basis of my disagreement with both Mr. Machan and William Simon.

Orthodoxy & Feminism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Julius Weinberg, in replying to Israel Kaminsky [Letters from Readers, February, in a discussion of Mr. Weinberg's review of *A Coat of Many Colors*, edited by Abraham D. Lavender, Books in Review, November 1978], accuses me of trying to make Orthodoxy "chic," of wanting the best of both worlds, at no cost. I have no interest in making Orthodoxy chic, or modern, or relevant, or democratic, or anything else. It will never be chic to observe a real *Shabbat*, when society glorifies the unrestrained, unrestricted "lifestyle" of "Saturday's Generation." Nor to spend precious hours studying Torah and Talmud, which won't qualify one for a high-paying job or even provide scintillating dinner-party conversation. Nor to pray three times a day, in an age that sets store by self-made, self-centered, men and women. Nor to observe *kashrut*, when one set of dishes and multi-ethnic cuisine will do. Nor to abstain from sex twelve days a month, followed by a visit to a *mikveh*, when sex as-the-mood-strikes-you is the unquestioned norm.

Nor, for that matter, will it ever be chic to observe marital fidelity, when "affairs" are now a sign of liberation of the sexes; nor to raise a Jewish family, when *Working Woman* and *Psychology Today* shout "stay free!"; nor to give a tithe of one's income to charity, and another tenth for yeshivah education for one's children, when upwardly mobile families could handily use those sums elsewhere.

No, I do not wish to make Orthodoxy chic, for I believe, as I have experienced, that a life lived according to *Halakhah* is a most worthwhile life, a richly textured life, in fact, a very blessed life. But, yes, I do want the best of both worlds—if by that is meant using the best insights of each to enrich the other. And despite the difficulties of reconciling the tension between the two, why should I not want the best of both, for I am a committed Jew and I am also a woman. I want to live my life as a *halakhic* Jew, but I do not believe for a moment that the divine plan for this world was to have women eternally consigned to second-class status (or none at all) in such areas as Jewish divorce law, liturgical and ritual responsibilities/rights, culture and leadership roles. Nor do I believe that the system will crumble and shred if women are given first-class status. I do not want to reject the basics; all I ask is that women have equal access to them.

Thus, the Orthodox community must explore ways in which it can open up more fully to women, consistent with its own value system and philosophy of human dignity, human accountability, human responsibility. While Mr. Weinberg might think of feminism as some sort of contaminating foreign body, I like to think of it, in good measure, as remarkably consistent with the ethical ideals of the Torah: "And God created Adam [humankind] in His image, male and female created He them."

That Jewish divorce law discriminates against women does not seem to me to be reflective of the essence of Judaism. More reflective is the process by which the *Halakhah* on divorce has undergone a more equitable reinterpretation over the course of many generations: movement from the absolute power of men to divorce their wives to a limitation of that power; movement from inadequate protections for women to an expansion of these protections. And it is the new understanding of equality that ought to compel us to push the process, a very Jewish process, further in our own times.

That the house of study (*bet midrash*), the Jewish court (*bet din*), and the synagogue—those places from which emanated status, power, authority, leadership, as well as spiritual and religious maturation—were virtually closed to female participation ought similarly to be perceived as form, and not essence, in Judaism. Now that women have begun to gain equal entry in all spheres of civil life—and neither society nor women have been found wanting—it behooves us to examine the new ideas from our own perspective: how can we incorporate the new understanding of women's potential in a manner that will enhance Judaism? What contributions toward our social and religious future can Jewish women make—as scholars, as teachers, as leaders, as rabbis, . . . as full members of a holy community? Mr. Weinberg's characterization of the "glacier-like pace" of change is accurate, but he does acknowledge that at certain points in Jewish history changes *were* made. In many instances, where there was a rabbinic will, there was to be found a *halakhic* way. Those who say today their hands are tied are unworthy of the authority vested in them. The only person whose hands are tied is the woman whose family must pay blackmail to secure her divorce, or the young woman who finds no outlet or encouragement for her desire to be a religious leader.

Both Mr. Weinberg and Mr. Kaminsky . . . fail to understand, or to admit, my critique of feminism from the standpoint of Judaism which is just as much a part of a Jewish feminism as is my critique of Orthodoxy. . . . I take a dialectical approach to feminism. Without yielding its legitimate claims to justice and equality, I vigorously separate myself from those elements that are antithetical to Jewish values and destructive of Jewish survival: an excessive emphasis on self-actualization that is untempered by the realities of life, and therefore erodes human relationships, commitment to family, and the continuity of the community. What I envision is an Orthodoxy that would allow for the maturation of women-as-Jews: learned, responsible, observant of *Halakhah*, able to exercise their full potential as Jews; women so committed to the Jewish people that they would incorporate its values and its needs as they begin to make the personal choices society now allows them. . . .

BLU GREENBERG
Riverdale, New York

JULIUS WEINBERG writes:

If "chic" is defined as those attitudes and practices that are attuned

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to an avant-garde "lifestyle," it is hard for me to see how Blu Greenberg can object to that description of the kind of Orthodoxy she envisions. It was not my intention, in my review of her essay in the Lavender collection, to pass judgment on her demand for a greater—and what she would consider a more meaningful—role for women within the framework of Orthodox Judaism; that is a question that will be resolved within the Orthodox community of which she is a part. I did, however, want to point out that given the character of current Orthodox leadership and practice—the increasing authority of the *Roshei Yeshivah* (the talmudic scholars, in contrast to those in the active rabbinate) and the fundamentalist trends within the Orthodox community—it is unlikely that *Halakhah*, the only basis for Orthodox practice, will be altered to repair what Mrs. Greenberg feels is a "second-class status" within Orthodoxy for women. Given the thrust of American Orthodoxy since 1945, Mrs. Greenberg's demands—the right to abortion, women as rabbis, and greater participation by women in ritual and liturgical roles in the home and synagogue—are simply not in the ideological cards.

Acculturation and a measure of affluence are changing the character of Orthodoxy; the opening in New York City of Kosher-Chinese restaurants and the creation of perukes that simulate the "shag" would indicate that, as in Europe and elsewhere, isolation for Orthodox Jews is an impossibility. And yet, the changes that have come into Orthodox life in the United States in recent years have been in the social sphere rather than in the realm of theology and ritual, an area that I suspect is of least consequence to Mrs. Greenberg and those for whom she speaks.

Race and the Court

To the Editor of Commentary:

In my letter in the December 1978 issue commenting on "Why Bakke Won't End Reverse Discrimination: 1" by William J. Bennett and Terry Eastland [September 1978], I stated:

> But is there any warrant for [Bennett and Eastland's] contention that the dissenting Justices held that the Fourteenth Amendment "permits race to be the *decisive* consideration in a university admissions program"?

To which Messrs. Bennett and Eastland replied:

> Five members of the Court have said it is all right to make race count, and count decisively.

The U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals originally and ostensibly read *Bakke* to mean that more than race may be "taken into account" and upheld the University of North Carolina's regulations that the student-elected campus governing body had to include at least two minority members and that the honor court which hears charges against students must have at least four of the seven judges of the same race or sex as the student charged.

The United States Supreme Court, on certiorari, sent the case back to the Circuit Court for review. On review, the Circuit Court now said (February 1979):

> Race may be a consideration in fixing the rights of students, *but at no stage did the Court affirm that race could be the determinant* (emphasis added).

That the issue is not stilled forever is proved by the minority in the same Circuit Court, who, despite the Supreme Court's obvious disapproval, said:

> *Bakke* does not hold that in all events racial criteria may not be the sole determinant in fixing the rights of students, although it "recognizes that race is a suspect classification."

The need for a Supreme Court decision which would finally put the issue to rest is most urgent and long overdue.

Most students of the legal question believe that Justice Powell's vote will be decisive in the pending *Weber* v. *Kaiser Aluminum* case, involving reverse discrimination in employment. How he will vote may be seen from his position in *Furnco Constr.* v. *Waters* and *Trustees* v. *Sweeney*, the first decided on the same day as *Bakke*, the second on November 13, 1978. Both were employment cases and, in both, Powell's position was with the majority and contrary to that of Marshall, Brennan, White, and Blackmun, who would give race more than "some consideration."

Jacob E. Heller
New York City

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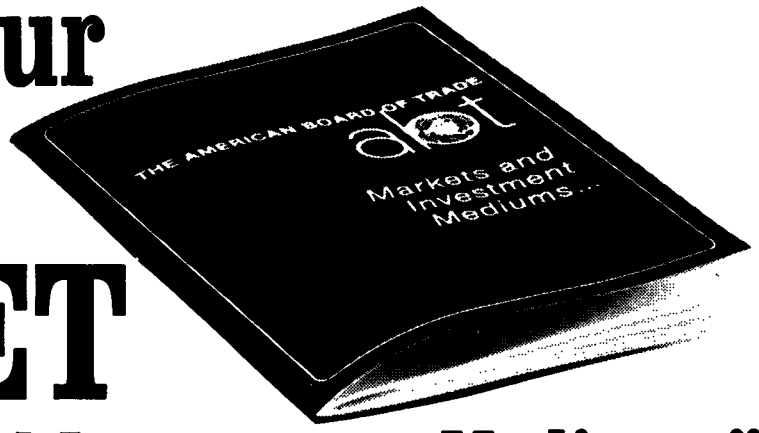

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Jewish Identity

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Although Pearl K. Bell [Fiction, "Good-Bad and Bad-Bad," December 1978] highlights most of the salient points made by Herman Wouk in *War and Remembrance*, she neglects to mention Wouk's view of the place of Jews in the dominant Christian society and of the proper response of the Jew to the search for identity—both subjects of major concern for Wouk.

Wouk considers the Jew to be an outsider, even in America, as can be seen in the following conversation between two of the main characters in *War and Remembrance*, Aaron Jastrow and his niece, Natalie Jastrow Henry:

> We're the eternal strangers, the outsiders in Christian Europe, and in times of breakdown we feel the impact first and hardest. It happened to us during the crusades, it happened in the plague years, it has happened during most wars and revolutions. The United States is a modern liberal oasis, full of natural wealth and protected by the ocean. We're able and we're hard workers, so we've done well there. But Natalie, if you think we're any less strangers there than in Germany, you're the childish one, not I! If the war should take a bad turn, a defeated America will be uglier than Nazi Germany. . . .

An even stronger statement is made . . . by Natalie Jastrow Henry. . . . Natalie, who is married to a Gentile, had been an "assimilated" Jewish woman for whom the religious affiliation of her husband had little significance. Natalie's thoughts in the Theresienstadt concentration camp supplement the author's view that, for the Jew, assimilation . . . is totally ill-conceived . . .:

> The great German oppression is due to the homelessness and defenselessness of the Jews. . . . Western liberalism was always a mirage. Assimilation is impossible. She herself [i.e., Natalie] has lived an empty Jewish life until now, but she has found herself. If she survives, her life will go to restoring the Jewish nation to its ancient soil in Palestine.

And this is what Herman Wouk says: you can live your whole life deceptively; but until you are true to yourself, there is no fulfillment. All glory given to you by man is meaningless. Material goods provide no satisfaction. . . . If you are a Jew, acknowledge that you are Jewish. Be true to Jewish law! Live in accordance with Jewish traditions and customs!

The message is clear. But Mrs. Bell, in her otherwise fine article, almost totally ignores Wouk's polemic against assimilation. . . .

[Rabbi] HERBERT YOSKOWITZ
Congregation Brith Shalom
Bellaire, Texas

PEARL K. BELL writes:

The subject of Jewish assimilation into Christian society may very well be a matter of "major concern" to Herman Wouk. But in the busily overcrowded pages of *War and Remembrance*, this complex subject never acquires the prominence, nor is it developed with the profundity, that Rabbi Yoskowitz claims for Wouk. Wouk's principal Jewish characters make noble statements, but this is not the same, in an adequately realized novel, as a convincing polemic or a genuine change of mind and heart.

Bukovsky

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I am over seventy and have spent a lifetime reading the pros and cons, the facts and myths, of socialism and Communism, but never have I read anything so profoundly persuasive and wise as Vladimir Bukovsky's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" [January]. In its psychological insight, realism, and impassioned moral affirmation, it is not just another article in a magazine, another excerpt from a book, but one of the great pieces of literature of our time. Only a great moral figure could have written it; and it is a deplorable commentary on the nightmare that is our time that the man who produced it was declared "insane" by the Soviet authorities and is probably so regarded even by those in the West who have abandoned the will to be free.

HAROLD MAGER
New York City

The Journal of American History

In June 1979 **The Journal of American History** begins its sixty-sixth volume, with a new attractive cover and a format that is redesigned throughout. The contents of the June issue reflect the **Journal's** endeavor to bring together the best traditions with the most recent concerns of American historians. The **Journal's** pages span all of American history; they are open to the differing methods and viewpoints that enliven study of the American past. Articles in the June issue include:

"The Slave Economies in Political Perspective"
Eugene D. Genovese's presidential address to the Organization of American Historians, a critical examination of the modern literature on slave economies.

"The Metamorphosis of Slavery, 1865-1900"
Pete Daniel's reflections on recent investigations of peonage and involuntary servitude.

"Apathy and Death in Early Jamestown"
Karen Ordahl Kupperman's reassessment of laziness and disease in light of modern knowledge of nutrition and the experience of prisoners of war.

"Modernization and Social Crisis: The Knights of Labor and a Midwest Community, 1885-1886"
Michael J. Cassity's analysis of workers' aspirations during two strikes in the mid-1880s—one a great success, the other a disastrous failure.

"American Atomic Strategy and the Hydrogen Bomb Decision"
David A. Rosenberg's account of the military's role in the H-bomb decision—based on important new research, some of it in recently declassified sources.

Articles in future issues will range from the nineteenth-century women's fashion industry to the Sacco-Vanzetti case, from new directions in the history of sports to the old progressives during the Cold War. One forthcoming issue will be devoted to new work on ethnicity. Every issue includes an extensive book review section and notices of recent articles, books, and dissertations. For subscription information write Organization of American Historians, 112 North Bryan, Bloomington, IN 47401.

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What government is doing about energy.

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The Politics of Jonestown

Midge Decter

On November 21, 1978, the New York *Times*—in a gesture normally reserved by that somber and august institution for the outbreak of war or the arrival of peace—carried a full seven-column front-page headline. The headline read, "400 Are Found Dead in Mass Suicide By Cult; Hundreds More Missing from Guyana Camp." The story that occasioned this uncharacteristic expression of urgency is by now probably familiar, in some version, to every literate person on the face of the globe: How a group in San Francisco known as the People's Temple, under the total and singular authority of a man calling himself the Reverend Jim Jones, set up, and retreated to, a commune named Jonestown in the jungle of Guyana in order to escape the budding curiosity of the local California press and public; how some defectors from the People's Temple and some families of young commune members pressed Congressman Leo Ryan, himself something of an adventurer, into making a trip to Guyana to investigate whether or not people were being kept there against their will; how Ryan and a party of those who had elected to leave Jonestown with him were gunned down at the airport; and how later that night the entire community of Jonestown—not the 400 first reported by the *Times* but more than 900 in number—were administered, whether voluntarily or under coercion, mortal doses of cyanide and fell into heaps of corpses however and wherever their ensuing agonies took them.

This is, to be sure, in and of itself a story to go into the annals of classic horror, with the kind of gaudy narrative elements that seem to be derived less from the real world, even the terrible real world as we have learned to know it, than from the pulps and old-fashioned Sunday supplements. One of the several subsequent *Times* editorials about Jonestown invoked the names of Joseph Conrad and his "Heart of Darkness"; but for Conrad the plot would surely have seemed too much, this mad dictator in the jungle, enjoying seignorial sexual rights over both his male and female followers, staging public beatings, torturing children, starving the elderly, and in the end bringing mass death by means of a poisoned fruit drink. Even the full-color photographs of the dead provided to the newsweeklies by the enterprising photographers who went into Jonestown with the troops sent to recover the bodies had an overdrawn quality about them; dressed in summer clothes, lying scattered in the vicinity of the vat containing the lethal purple liquid, the corpses caught by the camera look as if they were meant not to open our eyes to a fact but to illustrate a gothic tale. No doubt by now the Reverend Jones has taken his place among the celebrities of horror in Madame Tussaud's.

The unprecedented excitement of that November 21 headline on the front page of the *Times*, however—only a first representative symptom of an obsession that was to grip the public mind for months and that has not abated entirely yet—cannot be explained by the eventfulness or even the sheer horror of all that had happened in Jonestown. The number of those who had died or been murdered there, certainly, was haunting. How could so many deaths be achieved, the question asked itself over and over, barring a natural disaster or accident, without a stop being put to it? But ours is after all an age with good reason inured to the magnitudes of mass death, and long since hardened to the iconography of corpses heaped upon one another. Suicide, too, for all its current good publicity as a higher form of bravery and dignity, continues to haunt most of us as a finally inexplicable act; and mass suicide, even if performed under the whip, more so.

Nevertheless, the uncountable millions of words devoted to Jonestown in the weeks and months following its final night of terror—daily background stories in all the papers analyzing one or another aspect of the biography of Jim Jones, or of the history of the People's Temple, or of daily life in the Guyana jungle; discussions by columnists and commentators; special issues of magazines; interviews with psychiatrists, with friends and families of the deceased, with politicians who had once given Jones their blessing; two quickie paperback books* (and who knows how many more

Midge Decter, whose article, "Looting and Liberal Racism" (September 1977), received widespread attention, is the author of *The Liberated Woman & Other Americans, The New Chastity,* and *Liberal Parents, Radical Children.*

* *The Suicide Cult,* by Marshall Kilduff and Ron Javers, Bantam Books, 201 pp., $2.50; *Guyana Massacre,* by Charles A. Krause, Berkley Books, 210 pp., $2.50.

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volumes on the way), not to mention the number of homilies on the subject uttered from pulpits across the land—all of these were not words of shock at something unimaginable demanding to be understood. They came too quickly, were spoken with too much nervous assurance. They were, on the contrary, words of response to a phenomenon that in the event had proved to be only too imaginable. The obsession with the Reverend Jones and his flock that instantly took hold of the whole country was an obsession not with something in the realm of the mysterious but with a new dimension that had suddenly been lent to the familiar. The real shock of Jonestown to America, in other words, was a shock of recognition.

II

So many features of the story of the People's Temple, as it came to be revealed in ever richer detail, seemed—the only word for it—fitting. To begin with, there was the fact that the group, after a roundabout migration from Indianapolis via Belo Horizonte, Brazil, had settled in northern California. They were at that point a small band, seeking, as their leader announced, both to flee from the Middle Western bigotry that frowned on them as a racially integrated community and to find a safe haven from the coming nuclear holocaust (Ukiah, their original California port of call, had been declared by someone to be, along with Belo Horizonte, a possible place in which to escape the worst ravages of fallout). Before too long, of course, they were to resettle in San Francisco and expand greatly in size and public importance.

Now, the migration from Indianapolis to San Francisco, or indeed from any point in the United States to San Francisco, is a journey that has long been witnessed in the dreams, and the nightmares, of a goodly number of Americans. It has after all been the journey of choice of a whole army of runaway children. On the dream side, the very name of the city was for well over a decade to be the youthful shorthand symbol for freedom, revolution, and nirvana. On the nightmare side, it has conjured visions of drugs and dissolution and breakdown. In any case, running off to northern California is an action whose meaning is vivid in the public imagination, even in its relation to suicide, for San Francisco is among other things the suicide capital of the country.

Once settled in the land of heart's desire, both the internal and external relations of the People's Temple took forms with which, as we read about them, particularly in the accounts of defectors, we realized we had become quite familiar in recent years. Internally, for instance, the group was entirely in the thrall of the Reverend Jones. He led them, protected them, disciplined them, and instructed them. A major means of enlightenment and instruction were sessions in which one or two designated individuals would be told the "truth" about their failings and weaknesses before an assembled congregation. Sometimes little scenes of humiliation would be staged in which someone present was forced to confess to or publicly engage in acts of degradation. Occasionally, no doubt to instruct the entire assemblage in the virtues of humility and obedience, public beatings would be administered, to the accompaniment of the electronically amplified screaming of the elected tutee, frequently a child.

Of course such carryings on bespeak a serious species of mass psychopathology, leader to followers and vice versa, and to understand, for instance, how parents sat still for the beating of their children—a few didn't—one needs recourse to some of the more arcane researches into the psychic anomalies of torture and submission. On the other hand, group verbal assault and humiliation as the agencies for bringing a member or patient to new levels of illumination—defenselessness being regarded as the best fallow ground for the implantation of truth—have become a widespread and popular means of healing. They have, in one guise or another, presumably gentler than the Reverend Jones's but based on the same principle of dependency and group pressure, served in such disparate spiritual endeavors as the cure of drug addiction, the extirpation of racist, sexist, or elitist attitudes, and the overcoming of erotic inhibition. They have indeed become the stock-in-trade of this generation's encounter with the therapeutic.

As far as the relations of the People's Temple with the surrounding community, particularly the press, are concerned, there have been parallels in virtually every major city: groups—the Black Panthers* come most immediately to mind—whose tendency to somewhat less than lawful or attractive conduct was overlooked in the light of their proclaimed zeal for something they termed "social justice." It was the avowed purpose of the People's Temple, vaguely religious in its nominal affiliation, to make a socialist revolution, or at least to serve in the making of one. His status as an ordained minister of the Disciples of Christ notwithstanding, it was primarily as a political radical, for openers the builder of socialist communes in California and Guyana, that Jim Jones saw himself. He referred to the Bible as "this paper idol," and in his own church's magazine said, in language whose derivation is not exactly unfamiliar, "Neither my colleagues nor I are any longer

* The coincidences here were glaring but seemed to go unmentioned. Both groups earned high kudos for distributing milk, or breakfast, to the poor; both preached revolutionary suicide, though in the end the People's Temple proved more serious about the doctrine; and both enjoyed, along with such other distributors of alms to the poor and favorites of the press as Angela Davis, the estimable legal services of Counselor Charles Garry.

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caught up in the opiate of religion." His hero was not Jesus but Lenin, and Guyana's so-called "Marxist" government was one of the features that was to make that country so attractive to him. And later it was to be revealed that he had planned, if hounded out of Guyana, to take his model socialist society to the Soviet Union, or, in the event of the mass suicide he had clearly contemplated for some time, to leave the People's Temple treasury —several million dollars—to the Soviet government.

IF IT was primarily as a revolutionist that he saw himself, it was also primarily as a figure in the then going left-wing political fashion that he found warm acceptance among officials, politicians, and reporters. As the maximum leader of a tightly organized, obedient, small army of constituents—people to be sent ringing doorbells, cheering at rallies, or writing letters—Jones enjoyed a good deal of local political clout. The mayor, the district attorney, even the governor, were known to drop in on his Sunday services. Moreover, he succeeded in winning over the press, anyway so it is alleged by Marshall Kilduff and Ron Javers of the San Francisco *Chronicle* in *The Suicide Cult*, by being clever enough to bribe them with prizes and money. Yet neither his capacity to command workers and voters, nor his special relations with the press, nor even his necessary and much-vaunted personal force and charm, quite suffices to explain how he was able to plant himself in the middle of an open, enlightened society with a free press, and without the slightest hint of hostility or threat of exposure preside over a totalitarian mini-society. Here, too, as it was revealed to us that Jones had repeatedly been honored with appointive office (he had, for instance, been a Commissioner of Human Rights in Indianapolis and in San Francisco had been appointed to the Housing Authority), the feeling of the appropriateness of his having had such appointments did not arise from a notion of his political power. The fact is, he was to all outward appearance exactly the *type* of figure who had come to seem the natural occupant of certain kinds of positions in the newly constituted fields of poverty and race relations. He was a clergyman of sorts, he had been helpful to, and grown popular among, denizens of the ghetto, and he was above all both a pious and a vocal leftist. And although he was white, he falsely staked claim to some quantity of Cherokee blood, thus even qualifying as an official on grounds of membership in a minority group.

The question of how an institution like the People's Temple could have stood in our midst in the full light of day and remained cloaked in respectability is not, then, all that difficult to answer. Significantly, indeed, in all the millions of words devoted to the discussion of Jim Jones and Jonestown, this particular question somehow never even got asked. The answer is that professions of leftist sentiment, especially under conditions that manage to suggest some connection to minority status, for a long time provided immunity from too careful a public scrutiny. It is likely, and everyone, moreover, knows it is likely, that except for the murderous gravity of his pathology (and perhaps not except for that) Jim Jones is a figure with many counterparts who have in recent years been given places of honor among us.

And finally, if San Francisco seemed an inevitable starting point for our tale of horror, and if internal despotism combined with external radical socialism seemed the wholly recognizable ground on which it had been played out, what are we to say about the presence on the scene of its bloody denouement of both Charles Garry and Mark Lane? Even Central Casting would not have been so profligate of artistic convention. Two of the country's most famous radical attorneys, one, Garry, defender of the Panthers, Angela Davis, and countless of their confrères, one, Mark Lane, among other things bringer of posthumous justice for Lee Harvey Oswald, coming together (not without rivalry) in defense of the integrity of a Communist outpost in South America and being forced to flee for their lives together from a scene of mass carnage: it is as if Jim Jones had actually had in mind to stage not a mass suicide but a kind of summer-camp reunion-*cum*-melodrama from the late 60's.

III

ON THEIR return from Guyana, Messrs. Garry and Lane described for reporters how, while the rest of the visitors to Jonestown had departed for the airstrip where five would subsequently be killed and ten wounded, they had remained in the commune. When the distribution of the cyanide was about to commence, they said, one of the members of the commune came to them and in a state of joy and fervor hugged them and announced that the great moment of revolutionary suicide had arrived. Obviously something in the experience of these two men had prepared them for the idea that such an announcement would be both serious and real, for they did not hesitate a moment, neither in doubt about what to do for themselves nor in any vain effort to forestall the inevitable for anyone else. In a moment of revolutionary truth of their own, they asked simply, "How do we get out of here?"

This question not only provides a rather special glimpse into the quality and morality of certain lawyer-client relations, it also serves as a kind of scriptural text for most of the subsequent comment on Jonestown.

For the rush to talk about this ghastly affair was in no sense a rush to understand it but rather a rush to explain it away. Clearly, what the press

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wanted was a theory, a theory that would account as painlessly as possible for both the existence and power to command of the People's Temple. And such a theory was, as we know, immediately forthcoming. Moreover, it drew not at all on those elements of the story that had felt so familiar and fitting. On the contrary, everyone appeared to wish, like Charles Garry and Mark Lane, to get very far away from Jonestown in a big hurry.

Thus, that field of fallen bodies rotting beneath an equatorial sun was universally and instantaneously put down to the fact that the People's Temple was something called a "cult." There have been, and are, among us many cults, said everyone from establishment editorial writers to bewildered clergymen, all the way even to William F. Buckley, Jr.*; these cults are made up of marginal people—the downtrodden, the drugged, the depressed—who have become the easy prey of some guru preaching a new faith or attempting to refurbish an old one and who give over their lives, their minds, and their money into his keeping. Some cults have doctrines whose logic actually leads to violence, some, like the People's Temple, do not, but in the end the mindless conformity and surrender of the will which are at the heart of every cult make mass madness of the Jonestown kind an ever-present possibility.

Over and over again in the virtual torrent of analysis, three names appeared in close juxtaposition: Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church, the Hare Krishna sect, and Charles Manson. In each case, this odd triumvirate was named in order to remind us of the evil potential of cultic mind control that lurks all around and that has already found two such horrific expressions as the Manson murders and Jonestown. The New York *Post*, for instance, was joined by editorialists all over the country in calling for a thorough congressional investigation of cult groups, particularly the followers of Moon and Hare Krishna; and *this* time, everyone agreed, in contrast to how we behaved in the tragic case of the Reverend Jones, let us pay attention to the claims of concerned parents and frightened defectors before it is too late.

The experts who were consulted on the matter agreed in the main that cults exert a double appeal on their followers: they provide order and discipline, or a facsimile of order and discipline, and they promise some kind of escape into another life or world from the woes of this one. A group of Massachusetts clergymen, called together to discuss the implications of Jonestown, imputed the spread of such unfortunate "new forms of religious expression"—and they were certainly not, they said, prepared to characterize all "alternative churches" as unfortunate—to a growing disaffection with what traditional organized religions have to offer. In a similar, though more secular, vein, Marvin Harris, a professor of anthropology at Columbia University, writing on the New York *Times* Op-Ed page (November 26), charged that the historic vulnerability of people in certain predicaments to the appeal of "charismatic psychopaths" has lately been much exacerbated by the new wave of irrationalism sweeping through former centers of rationality like the university and the learned professions.

As for what in the end made it possible to lead people like Manson's gang or the members of the People's Temple into committing the grisliest forms of murder and suicide, here again the experts—social and political as well as psychological—had come to a fairly firm consensus. Dr. John Clark, a professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, spoke for a large body of opinion when he estimated that more than half the people who join cults are schizophrenic. Others of his colleagues, particularly Robert Jay Lifton, America's resident expert on death, emphasized on the other hand that the conditions under which ordinary people can be brought to a murderous pitch of thought control are not all that difficult to create.

But such differences aside, everyone who talked about the rise of religious cults in the United States in the 1970's shared the general view that it was to be accounted for by the emptiness, the emotional and spiritual vacuum, at the center of the lives of their adherents. Many, if not most, cultists have turned out to be young, white, and middle class, seeking, we are told, to replace the now vanished passion and fellowship of 1960's political activism or to escape the burdensome disorder, loneliness, and valuelessness of the society around them, particularly, as has been common, if the society around them happens to be California. In the specific case of the People's Temple, the ranks of the young, white, and middle-class seekers were considerably swelled by a group of elderly black people, as it seems, mostly elderly black women (what these latter were both seeking and seeking to escape in the magnetic field of Jim Jones was apparently so self-evident to press and experts as barely to merit a mention). In view of the individual illnesses and disturbances of these cultists, therefore, and in view of the public conditions, however defined, that were proving so conducive to the spread of religious mania, once they gave themselves to Jones, everything else in the unthinkable fate of his followers was step by repulsive step made thinkable.

IV

THUS, largely with the aid of the community of psychiatrists and psychologists and through the labors of a captivated and

* An illuminating exception, as is so often the case these days, was Michael Novak, whose columns in the Washington *Star* dared to relate the sickness of the People's Temple to its political doctrine.

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indefatigable press, we had ourselves been led through the jungle away from Jonestown and into a kind of clearing from where we could safely view the place through the wrong end of a very long telescope.

For while there are undoubtedly many important similarities between the People's Temple and the Unification Church, especially in the area of the general psychic condition of many of their respective adherents—and even, for the sake of argument, between them and the girl friends of Charles Manson—there is one overriding difference. Neither the Reverend Moon nor any of the other of the more prominent sect leaders has been honored with public appointments in the realm of social welfare, has been able to boast the warm personal acquaintance of such major politicians as the governor of the state of California, or has been able over a considerable period of time to insure his right of privacy with the press. Distraught parents seeking to rescue their children from Moon's church or the Jesus Freaks or other such groups have met obstacles in the courts but have had not the least difficulty in bringing their story to the attention of the public, in every known medium from the local papers up to national network television. Whereas not only were defectors from the People's Temple unable to find many people who would agree to hear their story, but when word got around that, after years of Jones's successful management of the news, *New West* magazine was preparing an investigative article about him, pressure to kill the piece was brought to bear on both the advertisers and editors from a stellar assortment of San Francisco businessmen and labor leaders and from no less a personage than the Lieutenant Governor of California, Mervyn Dymally. (The article appeared anyway, and it was one of the things that allegedly drove Jones to Guyana.) In a gossip-frenzied age, Jones had once even managed to forestall reportage of his arrest for lewd homosexual conduct in a Los Angeles movie theater—an achievement one doubts would be possible for Sun Myung Moon.

THAT the People's Temple filled the cultic needs of authority-starved, meaning-starved people may have made it possible for Jim Jones to control their money and their minds and, finally and most absolutely, their wills. But what made it possible for him to control the press and politicians was something else entirely: his credentials as a radical of the Left.

No more dramatic evidence of this point is needed than the confession of Charles A. Krause, a Washington *Post* reporter who had gone to Jonestown with Congressman Ryan's party and had himself been shot at and wounded in the airstrip massacre. Even after having spent a day in the commune, he tells us in his book, *Guyana Massacre*, he was not convinced of the bad things he had heard about it from the families of those whose status they had gone there to investigate. He had by his own account been given a "guided tour" of the place and had got into trouble when he tried to see things declared off limits to visitors; yet he had also been—the word recurs—"impressed," with the day nursery, with a special education building, above all, with the spirit and sense of fulfillment of his guides. That there was a cache of guns in Jonestown he knew; that these guns might actually constitute a danger, to himself as well as others, he simply could not imagine, even as he watched the people who were in a better position to know, namely, the defectors, cowering in fear. For a young man of Krause's background and political inclinations, it seems, guns in the midst of a community dedicated to "social change," to "build[ing] a multiracial, peaceful, egalitarian society," cannot almost by social definition be turned on anyone who sympathizes with such noble ends.

In his book, *Tell the West* (1950), one of the earliest and possibly still the best of the memoirs of life in the Soviet slave-labor camps in Siberia, Jerszy Gliksman describes Henry Wallace's famous tour of the Gulag: like Marina in the brothel, Wallace traveled, untouched, through the vale of horror where tens of millions would in the end perish from starvation, torture, and overwork, and brought back to the United States a glowing account of the development of Siberia. *Mutatis mutandis*, there is something of this in Krause's (and others') response in encountering the People's Temple—though it might be said in Wallace's extenuation that he at least could not speak the language of the prisoners and that the vastness of Siberia made it easy for his hosts to keep him from contact with them in any case. Krause describes himself during the drive out of Jonestown to the airstrip, sitting among the sixteen who had elected, during a scene of fear and unbelievable hysteria, to leave the commune and who were now, he said, with "apparent paranoia" trying to convince him that one among them was a spy sent to do them harm (the man who was in point of fact to open fire on them as soon as they entered the plane):

> I had decided to write a long and thoughtful piece . . . trying to explain the complicated motivations and convictions of everyone involved. . . . I was convinced that Jones was very sick, both physically and mentally. But the People's Temple hadn't struck me as a crazy fringe cult, like the Moonies or whoever they are who try to stick flowers in your lapel at every airport in America. It seemed to me that the People's Temple had a legitimate purpose, a noble purpose, and was more or less succeeding. The fact that sixteen people, most of them members of two families, were homesick and leaving . . . didn't change that view.

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It was, of course, Jones's goal of creating a Marxist-style egalitarian society that had differentiated the People's Temple in Krause's mind from the Moonies and other "crazies." In Jonestown, despite his early recognition that its successes were being exaggerated and its "failures" hidden from view, the young journalist knew where he was—or, to use the parlance consonant with the intellectual phenomenon being described here, knew "where" the People's Temple "was coming from." Possibly with the exception of Jones himself, he had seen the People's Temple type before. They were idealists, who might go a bit far for one's tastes, whose being forced to withstand the hostility if not outright persecution of establishment society had made them a little flaky and fanatic, whose taste in style of living might not be one's own, but whose values were right and admirable (and whose extreme commitment to those values might even leave one feeling ever so slightly soft and unworthy). Krause's ruminations as he was being driven through the Guyanese wilderness to the scene of carnage that lay in store were of course not the result of some private foolishness. They were the summation of more than a decade's worth of apology for totalitarianism and violence on the Left on the grounds that however much one might deplore such things, they were after all being done in the name of a higher social justice.

The great rush to do precisely what Krause had at first said ought not be done—that is, to identify the People's Temple as yet another crazy fringe cult—thus did not simply follow from the growing horror at what was daily being revealed about the group's pre-suicide life together. On the contrary, it represented what can only be called a massive effort to deny: to deny the (to say the least) embarrassing memory of how recently the group and its leader had been basking in the admiration of enlightened society, and beyond that, to deny the recognition of how the special tolerance extended to all who proclaimed themselves radical might have contributed to a certain amount of mischief in the world.

Seen under the aspect of religious insanity, the People's Temple becomes a manageable if hair-raising comment on some of the darker sides of the human mind which have, as Marvin Harris pointed out, sadly had their moments before in American history. Seen as what it actually was—and Charles Krause, albeit ingenuously, supplied the truth here—namely, an outgrowth of 1960's radicalism, the People's Temple would have been an intolerable reminder of how close a brush we and our children, the agencies of our government, and some of the major institutions of our society have permitted ourselves to have with revolutionary suicide.

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Converting the Gentiles?

Peter L. Berger

RABBI Alexander Schindler, in a presidential address to the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations on December 2, 1978, proposed that American Judaism (or at any rate its Reform wing) actively seek converts from among the religiously unaffiliated: "I believe that it is time for our movement to launch a carefully conceived Outreach Program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking roots in religion." Modern Jews, Rabbi Schindler acknowledged, have for all sorts of reasons been reluctant to seek converts, but this reluctance is no longer appropriate in today's American context. He spoke of the great religious hunger in the country, a hunger leading some people into bizarre and destructive cults (this was shortly after the Jonestown affair), and concluded: "My friends, we Jews possess the water which can slake the thirst, the bread which can sate the great hunger. Let us offer it freely, proudly—for *our* well-being and for the sake of those who earnestly seek what is ours to give."

The Board responded positively to Rabbi Schindler's proposal. It passed a resolution which, in addition to some other measures, called on the Reform movement to "plan a special program to bring the message of Judaism to any and all who wish to examine or embrace it. Judaism is not an exclusive club of born Jews; it is a universal faith with an ancient tradition which has deep resonance for people alive today."

Does this signal the beginning of an extravagant campaign to convert America to Judaism? Nothing of the sort. Rabbi Schindler was not suggesting that active members of Christian churches be approached in a missionary spirit; only the religiously unaffiliated were to be considered potential converts. Moreover, both Rabbi Schindler's address and the Board's resolution dealt with the issue in the broader context of the demographic future of American Judaism. Other measures proposed were an intensification of Jewish educational programs and a more welcoming attitude to the Gentile partners in mixed marriages.

But muted or not, Rabbi Schindler's address attracted immediate and widespread attention, both in the secular press and in the Jewish community. For the press there was the appeal of a man-bites-dog story. American Jews had long been nervous about and resentful of missionary activities directed at themselves (be it by conservative Christian churches, by groups such as the "Hebrew-Christians" or "Jews for Jesus," or, more recently, by a variety of sects of Asian provenance). Were Jews now going to do to others what they did not want done to themselves?

Within the Jewish community there were deeper misgivings. What was being proposed here, after all, was a reversal of a centuries-old attitude of Judaism; not since the Hellenistic era had the synagogue been an aggressively missionary institution. And there were more immediate concerns. Might this new attitude encourage anti-Semitism or undermine Gentile support for the cause of Israel? Could it upset the civil peace among the major religious bodies in this country, that delicate "tripartite" arrangement first defined by Will Herberg in 1955? One important part of that arrangement has been the principle, enunciated by Reinhold Niebuhr in 1958, that Christian churches should not seek to convert individuals with a positive Jewish identification—a principle that had become explicit policy within mainline Protestantism and increasingly (though more tacitly) in the Catholic church. Were Jews now to give notice that this arrangement was no longer binding?

There are aspects of this matter that anyone who, like myself, is not a Jew, cannot properly address. Only Jews can decide the proper boundaries of Jewish faith and Jewish peoplehood, as Jews must define for themselves the inner meaning of Jewish faith and Jewish identity in contemporary America. Nor can anyone (Jew or non-Jew) give ready answers to the questions I have just enumerated. Anti-Semitism is a deeply-rooted pathology of the Western psyche, and it can never be assumed that serious eruptions have been permanently contained. All the same, it seems unlikely that the conversion to Judaism of a few lapsed

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Presbyterians would provoke anti-Semitic reactions—except among those already so disposed and for whom any other excuse would do just as well. This probably goes for attitudes toward Israel as well. As to the civil peace among the major denominations, it is equally hard to imagine that irate Presbyterians would launch a missionary counteroffensive. The mainline Christian churches are in a state of theological exhaustion and are most unlikely to be roused from it by a little Jewish proselytizing; and as for the theologically more vigorous groups, they have never felt bound by the Niebuhrian principle in any case.

From a sociological point of view, then, it is reasonable to regard Rabbi Schindler's proposal as a sensible and low-risk measure of Jewish demographic self-defense. From the viewpoint of liberal Protestantism (to which I subscribe), as there is no interest in converting believing Jews to Christianity and certainly no interest in the reverse procedure, there can also be no objection (either theologically or in terms of religious liberty) if Judaism should now become more generous in sharing its heritage with individuals of whatever ethnic background who freely seek such a share. If that were all, a non-Jewish observer could express general approval of the idea, leaving it to Jews themselves to argue its merits.

But there is more to be said, both sociologically and religiously. Sociologically, what is at issue here is the dynamics of pluralism—a matter that must be of serious interest to those with a stake in any religious tradition and one which is bound to touch Judaism in ways that go far beyond considerations of demography. Religiously, the issue is that of a new contestation among all the great traditions which the pluralistic situation is bringing about. This contestation carries within it an immense challenge and perhaps the most hopeful prospect for the fate of religion in the modern world.

PLURALISM is commonly taken to be a distinctively American phenomenon. This is correct as far as it goes. The distinctive features of American history, notably the patterns of immigration and the political institutions within which the different immigrant groups succeeded in accommodating themselves, have created a pluralistic situation unique in the world. Yet pluralism itself is not unique but a general product of modernization, and as such it now exists in all modern and modernizing societies.

While the causes and the ramifications of this phenomenon are very complex, its basic feature can be simply stated: modernization breaks down barriers among human groups. Where pre-modern men tended to live in relatively closed communities, among "their own," modern men tend to live in intense and ongoing interaction with others who are not their own. The structures of modern urbanism, and the sheer geographical mobility made possible by modern technology, put the individual face-to-face with countless others from different communities. And beyond the physical presence of all these others there is the more abstract but no less real presence of other societies, other ways of life, and other systems of meaning that come to the individual through the modern media of communication. Hence a fundamental trait of modernity: everyone is rubbing elbows with everyone else.

Pluralism, in this sense, is an objective constituent of the social world and not a matter of individual consciousness. But the external collision of groups and communities obviously has its correlate *within* consciousness—in the collision of meanings, values, and overall systems of belief including, perhaps particularly, religious beliefs. In this country, at least in the larger cities or in the vicinity of college campuses, one can walk into a bookstore and, for a reasonable sum, purchase paperback editions of good translations of the sacred scriptures of most of the world's religious traditions. In most of the same places one can also take courses expounding the various traditions, and in quite a few one can meet their representatives in the flesh. For anyone with a personal and intellectual concern for religion, the sum total of human religious experience is present, accessible, and on the horizon of consciousness in a way in which it has never been before.

If the social and political problem of pluralism is, how are all these people to live together in a modicum of peace?, the intellectual or cognitive problem is, how can all these alternative definitions of reality coexist in consciousness? This problem, too, it goes without saying, is very complex, but its major feature can again be stated simply: the presence of all those "others" continually undermines the taken-for-granted quality of moral and religious beliefs. At the least, those beliefs now have to be reflected upon, articulated, and defended against what challenges them; at most, all beliefs are placed into a cauldron of relativity in which they become deliberate and reversible choices. In either case, what previously was fate has now become a matter of decision.

The essence of any truly traditional existence is its taken-for-grantedness, and this is precisely what pluralism calls into question. To gauge the import of this for modern Judaism, one need only try to imagine the reaction of a Jew living in a traditional community (say, an East European *shtetl*) to a discussion by contemporary American Jews of their "problem of Jewish identity." The problem of Jewish survival—*that* he would have understood, and he would also have understood the problem of keeping faith in God, in Torah, and in the Messiah in the face of adversity. But a problem of identity? Jewish identity, for better or for worse, was something assumed—a datum which, to be sure, gave rise to many problems, but which itself was not problematic.

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If one has a commitment to (or even a nostalgia for) traditional Judaism, contemporary discussions of "Jewish identity" might easily be seen as symptoms of spiritual degeneration. And perhaps they are. But the simple fact is that the loss of the taken-for-granted quality is as much a given in the current situation as the fate of being a Jew was in an older situation. The experience of the modern world, in America most of all, includes the progressive translation of what once were destinies into choices.

Of course, to be a Jew, even in pluralist America, is not *just* a matter of choice. There is the weight of biography and cultural heritage, there are pressures from one's immediate environment and from the larger society (including the negative pressure of anti-Semitism). Still, to be a Jew in the contemporary situation is *more* a matter of choice than it has been at almost any previous time in Jewish history.

One sometimes hears it claimed that Judaism is not vulnerable, or is less vulnerable than Christianity, to the intellectual doubts brought on by modernity because Judaism, unlike Christianity, is not a dogmatic religion: *Halakhah*, not doctrine, is the heart of Judaism. Yet modern Jewish history hardly supports this proposition, and it is important to understand why. The cognitive structure of a human community is not to be equated with a doctrine or a set of theories. Rather, it is the overarching canopy of meanings within which reality makes sense to individuals. It is precisely this canopy of meanings which pluralism attacks and renders open to doubt. Such doubt may center on doctrine: "Can I really be sure that Jesus Christ is divine lord and savior?" or "Can I still believe in the biblical account of creation?"—but it may also center on practice: "What sense does it really make to keep a kosher kitchen?" or "Can I still feel bound to live by the commandments of Torah?"

THE strategies by which individuals and groups try to cope with the loss of traditional taken-for-grantedness run the gamut from total acceptance to total rejection. If the loss is truly accepted, then the religious identity of the individual or group indeed becomes a complete matter of choice, a "preference"—which, by definition, is not rooted deeply in consciousness and therefore may be changed with relative ease. Thus Judaism has for many become a "denomination," in the sense given to that term by H. Richard Niebuhr—that is, a religious institution that has surrendered its claim to monopoly status. This "denominationalization" of religion has had very grave consequences for the Protestant churches that first went through it, and the consequences have been even more severe for Judaism, given its minority status in a predominantly Christian society. Quite simply, to have a Jewish "preference" is frequently the last stage before even that mild option ceases to be plausible; "denominationalization" tends to be a way station toward secularity.

To be sure, one can be a secular Jew, and even call that an identity, but it is doubtful whether such an identity can sustain one for long—especially in the absence, or even relative absence, of anti-Semitic pressures. In this connection, the insistence by some that the Holocaust must be the core of Jewish self-reflection today has the function of freezing the presence of anti-Semitism in the consciousness of Jews—and thus of covering up the question of why one should be a Jew. This strategy will be plausible to individuals in the degree that it corresponds to their own experience of the social world. If it corresponds only weakly or not at all—that is, if the individual has not experienced anti-Semitism that even remotely adumbrates Nazism—the insistence that the Holocaust is an ever-present reality is unlikely to be persuasive, and may even achieve the opposite of what is intended: why should one be a Jew if horror is the central reality to which one is linked by virtue of Jewish identity? It is hard to believe that, barring a massive upsurge of anti-Semitism in America, a Jewish identity can be permanently reconstructed on the basis of ongoing remembrance of the Holocaust. (It goes without saying that there are other reasons to remember the Holocaust, but they cannot readily be linked to the problem under discussion here.)

But if there are difficulties in accepting the loss of traditional taken-for-grantedness, there are also difficulties in rejecting it. Any attempt to restore a traditional form of existence and consciousness must take place within a social milieu, in which that enterprise is plausible. If the society as a whole no longer provides such a milieu, it must be deliberately constructed; if the *shtetl* no longer exists, it must be reinvented, along with the structures necessary to protect the individual from the corrosive influences of society at large.

A visual example of this possibility may be had in New York, by driving on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. There are two bridges over the expressway in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, and at just about any time of the day one can see a number of people walking back and forth on these bridges, dressed in the traditional garb of East European Hasidim. It is as if time were standing still, an impression all the more striking in view of the turbulent metropolis surrounding these enclaves of rigorously traditional life. By all accounts these hasidic communities are indeed surviving in their improbable geographical setting, but the setting already points to an intrinsic difficulty. The two bridges, after all, span a traffic artery that links downtown Manhattan with its major airports. The people who walk on these bridges are within constant reach of an overwhelmingly powerful system of communications, each element of which radically denies the plausi-

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bility of neo-traditional existence and consciousness. The "neo-*shtetl*," of course, is constructed so as to keep these influences out, but this requires an immense and ongoing effort. As for the individual in this situation, however sheltered he may be, he knows that he can make his exit by walking across the bridge and taking the subway.

This is the fundamental problem with all forms of neo-traditionalism, of which the example of the Brooklyn Hasidim is admittedly an extreme case. The modern transition from fate to choice may be denied, tradition may be reaffirmed "as if nothing had happened," but this means that an existence chosen at every moment by the individual living it must be treated as if it were not chosen at all, as if it were really destiny. A cognitive strategy that is subject to ongoing empirical falsification can be very hard to keep going.

If "denominationalization" and neo-traditionalism were the only options for religion in the modern world, the outlook would be very bleak. It happens, however, that the very nature of the religious phenomenon opens up another possibility. At the heart of religion is neither doctrine nor social structure but a distinctive experience of realities that transcend the reality of ordinary life, an experience that has been described with precision by Rudolf Otto and other analysts of the sacred. Every religious tradition originates in such an experience. The vitality of a tradition depends on the success with which the experience it embodies can be "handed on" (the literal sense of tradition) from one generation to another.

Of course some traditions become dry, empty forms, which no longer have the capacity to revivify the experience for new generations. This, however, is not inevitable; clearly the great traditions of religious history have always had the ability to revivify the experiences from which they derive. This ability is of particular import under the conditions of modernity. For the "turning-to-experience" which has been so characteristic of modern thought in general at least since Descartes has its theological dimension as well—perhaps especially in Protestantism, the religious community with the longest and most intimate relation to modernity. In Judaism, too, the biographies of Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Abraham Heschel contain precisely such rediscoveries of the experiential contents of the religious tradition. These rediscoveries require social confirmation, as all human experiences must find some sort of institutional expression if they are to survive over time. But the individual who has in his own life and consciousness experienced his tradition anew does gain, if not the old taken-for-granted faith, at least a new measure of self-assurance.

This does not mean that the "turning-to-experience" magically transports an individual or a group out of the modern situation and its pressures; there continue to be all those "others" who have not shared the experience and who, if given the chance, would deny its claims. It does mean that the experiences and beliefs of others have a significance they never had in the traditional situation, and this has far-reaching implications precisely for those who have a living relation to a body of religious truth. The most important implication is that the argument which once went on between those inside and those outside a religious community now goes on within the consciousness of the individual. If he is fortunate enough to have some religious experience of his own to stand upon, he is still under pressure to relate this experience to the experiences of others. Applying this proposition to the situation of the Jew in the pluralized situation, one can say this: he may have a plausible answer as to *why* he identifies himself as a Jew, but he must also be in a position to articulate (to himself if not to others) *how* his Jewish identity relates to the empirically available alternatives of existence and belief.

In other words, the believing individual is always both inside and outside his commitment to his own faith, and can only convince himself if he can (at least in principle) convince others. If this point is grasped, the missionary possibility attains a hitherto unsuspected dimension. It is now no longer an expression of institutional strategy, let alone of religious arrogance or aggression. On a more basic level, it is an imperative. Whether the engagement with the outsider actually leads to conversions or changes of religious affiliation is not essential. Rather, what is essential is that every committed individual, and every community of such individuals, engage with all the significant alternatives. If this proposition were put in the form of advice to any particular religious community, it would run as follows: you will not be able to keep your own unless you are prepared to persuade others.

Rabbi Schindler may not have had this in mind when he made his recommendation that American Judaism should actively seek converts. Still, the argument strongly supports the validity of his recommendation. Surely it should not trouble anyone who believes that Judaism does indeed contain truth, for no truth is falsified by comparison and contestation. But even more mundane considerations lead to the conclusion that Judaism has nothing to fear from such a course. One need only look at the spiritual and intellectual poverty of some of the movements that have successfully gained converts in recent years, and compare them with the treasures embodied in the Jewish tradition. There are no grounds to suppose that Judaism would come out a loser in a religious contestation. On the contrary, recent data (especially on interreligious marriages) suggest a contrary prediction.

IF THE dynamics of modern pluralism make a missionary stance plausible for American Judaism, theological considerations

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make it welcome. For in the quest for religious truth, the pluralistic situation is one in which uncertainties can be turned into new opportunities. Pluralism forces individuals to make choices. The tradition can no longer be taken for granted as it stands and as a whole; the individual must choose his stance in the face of it.

One possible choice, of course, is that of the neo-traditionalist. But the individual who finds himself unable to make that choice now confronts his own tradition in a new stance of freedom. Inevitably, he will be a "heretic," in that he will select, will "pick and choose," from what the tradition makes available to him. (The Greek word *haeresis* means choice.) In this way he will be pressed toward a double engagement—with his own tradition, and with the other traditions within his reach. If this can lead to shallowness, triviality, and religious "consumerism," it can also lead to a profound revitalization of religious consciousness.

Every vision of the world attains lucidity in contest with other visions, and how much more so in the case of religious visions. The experience of ancient Israel gained lucidity, indeed certainty, in its contest with the alternatives available in the surrounding civilization of the Near East. In large measure, the Hebrew Bible is the outcome of this contest. Similarly, Christianity attained self-consciousness in contestation with a variety of other religious movements and cults in the Greco-Roman world. The way to "one's own" has often led through interaction with the "other." Contemporary pluralism has greatly enlarged the cross-cultural scope of that "other." This creates problems; it also offers great promise.

For this reason, interreligious dialogue should be high on the agenda of every religious community in the contemporary world—not just for moral or socio-political reasons, such as cooperation with others for the achievement of universal goals like peace and social justice, or for the furtherance of amicable relations (although these are thoroughly worthwhile enterprises), but also for theological reasons. Such dialogue must include a common search for truth, taking the visions of others with total seriousness—and with the readiness, in principle, to accept another's truth.

There is not much dialogue of this kind just now, and what there is of it rarely goes beyond either disinterested scholarship or mutual self-explanation. Dialogue between Jews and Christians (again, for perfectly understandable reasons) only rarely deals with the truth claims of the two communities. In America, if not elsewhere, a deeper dialogue should now be possible. Whether any sort of dialogue will be possible with resurgent Islam will largely depend on international politics. Theologically speaking, however, the most important dialogue to come is that between the monotheistic faiths originating in western Asia and the traditions that have come out of the subcontinent of India. Here, between the symbolic poles of Jerusalem and Benares, is to be found the single most important alternative in human religious history. It is possible that *this* contestation will have the most far-reaching impact on the future course of both Judaism and Christianity.

IT HAS been said a number of times in recent years that there are now three foci of Jewish experience—Israel, the Soviet Union, and America. Each has its own distinctive quality, and its own significance for the future of the Jewish people. Yet it is noteworthy that both the Israeli and the Soviet situations are replications of earlier historical configurations—respectively, Jewish existence under sovereignty and under alien oppression. It is the American focus that represents a historically unprecedented case—the existence of the Jewish people under conditions of pluralism in which Judaism is a fully recognized ingredient of the religious heritage of the nation. It is not unreasonable to think that the theological consequences of this situation may also turn out to be unprecedented. The possibility evoked here is that of a self-assured Judaism entering into open contestation with the full range of religious options in the contemporary situation, and thus taking an active part in the historic battle against the inroads of modern secularism.

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Portrait of the Radical as an Aging Man

William Barrett

PHILIP RAHV might seem to be a figure of purely local and circumscribed interest. He was, with William Phillips, co-founder of *Partisan Review* in 1934, and thereafter continued as an editor of that magazine during the following two decades. His activities were thus confined to a particular area, and in his own person he might serve as a prime example of what has come to be called the New York intellectual, a member of a special circle—a "coterie" figure, as it used once to be stigmatized. Yet during the time of his editorship, and particularly the first two decades, he was at the center of most of the intellectual currents that flowed through and around New York, which is to say the currents that were to prove most significant for the nation as a whole. American memories, however, are very short-lived: the 1960's, for example, chose to forget entirely that the preceding generation had gone through an experience of Marxism from which something might have been learned. A recent collection of Rahv's writings, *Essays on Literature and Politics 1932-1972*,* serves as a timely invitation to remembrance; and memory, in this case, should prod us to ask, not only about his formal performance as a literary critic, but about the man himself and his times and what they may have to teach us.

I had just begun to ponder such questions when something in the current press caught my attention and made them seem far from academic. A piece in *Newsweek* by George F. Will rang some obscure bell of remembrance and I found myself looking back into an old review by Philip Rahv. Will's piece appeared in January 1979, and Rahv's in *Partisan Review* in the fall of 1952. Thus between them there is a stretch of twenty-seven years of history, which in the aspect they both share has a consistency so ominous that it may be worthwhile to explore the comparison for a moment.

Will's title is "Fear of Facing the Truth," and the particular fear he deals with is that of the "American political class" to face the reality of Soviet intentions. By this time, so his argument runs, the official misreadings of Soviet moves—always in the direction of giving the Russians the benefit of the doubt—are so numerous and well documented, and so often contrary to the evidence provided by official intelligence sources themselves, that Will can only conclude that the failure must lie—not in our intelligence capacities—but in the desire of the "political class" to disbelieve in the evidence of intelligence. "When people are so wrong for so long on the same subject, in the same direction, the failure is not of intelligence but of will. For such people, ignorance is a strategy. Their problem is not in finding the truth, but in facing it."

Will does not identify the harborers of this fear of reality except as the "American political class"—presumably including both elected and unelected officials. But this characterization is surely too sketchy and incomplete. This American political class, after all, does not come from nowhere. Its thinking is nourished by certain roots in the prevalent culture, and its attitudes are drawn from the prevailing climate. What, then, is this part of the American mind that leaves it persistently unwilling to believe the worst about Russian intentions?

It was the sense of these questions that must have stirred my memory and led me to look back for an answer in something Philip Rahv had written a quarter of a century earlier. There Rahv was reviewing Whittaker Chambers's *Witness*, and the particular unwillingness to face reality in that case was the fear of confronting the kind of facts that Chambers had brought forward in his allegations against Alger Hiss. A large part of the American nation simply refused to believe the evidence that Soviet intelligence, in the persons of officials like Harry Dexter White and Alger Hiss, had been able to penetrate to the top layers of the United States government. Rahv does not, like the journalist George Will, pin this refusal of reality upon a particular class or group. Instead he follows Chambers himself in attributing it to the "Popular Front Mind" that dominated American life "for a whole decade, if not longer, at the very least between 1938 and 1948." Just as this "Popular Front Mind" had made possible the infiltration into government in the first place, so

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now it recoiled in anguish and unreasoning anger when the facts were disclosed. And here Rahv's own words are powerful, to the point, and very well worth recalling:

> The importance of the Hiss case was precisely that it dramatized that [viz., the Popular Front] mind's struggle for survival and its vindictiveness under attack. That mind is above all terrified of the disorder and evil of history, and it flees the harsh choices which history so often imposes. It fought to save Hiss in order to safeguard its own illusions and to escape the knowledge of its own gullibility and chronic refusal of reality.

This is excellent, but still one may wonder whether the "Popular Front Mind" may not be too narrow a characterization of the force that was operating around the Hiss case. And here some conversations with Rahv at that time may have a bearing. He talked out his pieces as he was engaged in writing them. They took possession of him; he could write nothing from the top of his mind, even fairly trivial things, and thus was incapable of the journalistic facility for which he sneered at, but secretly envied, his former colleague on *Partisan Review*, Dwight Macdonald. It was as if Rahv's whole being, his body included, conspired in the process of getting out his essays, as he grunted, cajoled, and fulminated them into shape. And in the midst of the birth-throes of this particular piece, I remember his remarking to me one day: "The liberals now dominate all the cultural channels in this country. If you break completely with this dominant atmosphere, you're a dead duck. James Burnham has committed suicide. And Sidney Hook is practically going the same way." Burnham, having been a leading Trotskyist, had deliberately and openly changed his whole political philosophy and taken a sharp swing to the Right, so that he expected to be cut off from liberal channels. But Sidney Hook, author of two of the early classics in English on Marxism, remained what he had always been, a resolute Social Democrat who insisted on preaching the evils of Russian Communism to the benighted American public, no matter if the underhanded accusation of McCarthyism would be made against him. And, of course, the slurs were made, and they hurt Hook, though they did not stop him: he had to tell the truth as he saw it, however unpopular his public image became.

Thus, to speak of the "Popular Front Mind" might somehow cushion the blow Rahv was striking and make it possibly a little more acceptable to liberal readers. But even if one accepts the strategy behind this choice of phrase, particularly amid the pressures of that situation, one can still quarrel with it as an accurate description. It seems in fact too narrow to fit the peculiar and pervasive phenomenon at work here. For those young people fresh out of college in 1952 who took up the cause of Alger Hiss simply as the automatic and spontaneous liberal response, the memories of the Popular Front, if they were there at all, were hardly alive and vigorous enough to account for their partisan passion. Nor would the influence of the Popular Front explain all those people in subsequent years who flocked to Hiss's banner with scarcely a glance at the evidence. To ascribe the reaction in the Hiss case to the Popular Front is to confine the whole matter too narrowly to certain circles around New York or Hollywood that were more conscious of their purposes, more deliberately of the Left, and fundamentally Marxist in conviction. True, the attitudes of the Popular Front did mold liberal attitudes in the late 1930's; but if the liberal mind was thus shaped for a certain period, it is in fact a phenomenon of much broader scope and much more deeply in the American grain—particularly in its disposition not to see the "disorder and evil of history"—than would be gathered from its temporary union with the Popular Front.

But whatever we call it—the mind of the Popular Front or the liberal mind—the important thing is to take note of the fact itself: to recognize that a certain attitude of the American mind has been continuously and potently with us for a long time; that this same attitude of mind that turned its back in panic on the evidence against Hiss is now at work in our "political class" and makes it turn away from the evidence of Russian intentions. And the words that Rahv used in the case of Hiss's defenders may be suitably transcribed for the mind at work in our present "political class":

> That mind is above all terrified of the disorder and evil of history, and it flees the harsh choices which history so often imposes.

And if both writers, Rahv and Will, are here speaking to the same point, if it is the same continuing reality that prompts the indictment of both, then we have also here to recognize that we are dealing with a major and massive fact of American history in our lifetime—and one with perhaps fateful consequences. And the fact that Rahv spotted it a quarter of a century ago should be enough to end once and for all any idle notion that he, as a New York intellectual and an editor of a "little" magazine, was involved merely with the internal squabbles of a coterie.

There is a further point in beginning with this particular review by Rahv because it foreshadows an eventual change in the direction of his political attitudes. He did not expressly attack liberals on this occasion, though they were plainly to be included under the intent of his indictment. Was this the beginning of a retreat on his part? One can explain it as strategy: he had a point to make, about the recoil of the intelligentsia before the evidence against Hiss, and he wanted to make it in a way that might still get through to those liberal readers who might not yet

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be frozen in their prejudices. At the same time, it was necessary to detach the issues in the Hiss case from the McCarthyism of the period—which Rahv did in a companion piece to his review of Chambers. But thereafter the weight of his emphasis began to shift in this latter direction. As the 1950's went on, the targets of his attack gradually shifted and he began to drop sharp words about "anti-Communism" and "anti-Communists" whenever the occasion presented itself. This was puzzling behavior at the time, since his whole political life up to that point had been a long and gallant war against Stalinist Communism (the only Communism we knew) and against Stalinizing and fellow-traveling liberals. It was also somewhat distressing, for some of these "anti-Communists" whom he now belittled had been his comrades-in-arms during those earlier battles. Nevertheless, his disparagement of anti-Communism continued during the 1950's, and then in the following decade he took the next step and became a leftist in the fashion of that period. Hitherto, in the 1930's and 1940's, he had fought against the dominant trend, but now in the 1960's he had turned about and was running with the pack.

How did this change come about? It makes an interesting case study in the radical sensibility of our time.

II

One advantage of the present collection is that it reprints some incidental and minor pieces that have no great intrinsic merit but allow us to follow the steps in Rahv's political development. And as we pick our way through them, that development is seen to have a clear and tidy shape: it moves in a large circle that returns exactly to its point of origin. Thus the first period, illustrated by two pieces from the Communist-party magazine, *New Masses* (1932), and its paper, the *Daily Worker* (1934), shows us the young Rahv as a straightforward party-line scribe; and anyone who knows only Rahv's later literary essays will come upon them as a shock. When Rahv sat down to write them, Delmore Schwartz once remarked, he simply put on a uniform. In the middle of the 1930's there came his break with the Communist party and the launching of the new *Partisan Review*. It was not an easy thing in the intellectual atmosphere of New York in those days to bring out a magazine that was systematically critical of the Soviet Union, and we all owed a debt to the courage and vitality of its young editors, who included, besides Rahv and William Phillips, Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, and F. W. Dupee. To the young people of my generation, either in college or academic life, they brought a radical but unregimented voice that was needed.

The influence of Trotsky had been personally decisive in leading Rahv to break with the Communist party. But the figure of Trotsky also curiously distorted his perspective on the Russian revolution. Trotsky was the brilliant and charismatic figure, the rightful heir of the revolution who had been dispossessed. Consequently, if the revolution had turned out badly, that was because it had been captured by one evil individual, Stalin. The fixation upon the personal drama prevented Rahv from reflecting on the nature of revolutions generally and on the dynamics of power they bring with them, such that they usually end badly and only turn up worse monsters than those they abolish. That Trotsky in his dealings with the American Trotskyists showed no very great democratic leanings, did not particularly affect Rahv. When James Burnham, then an active Trotskyist, declared that socialism was not to be viewed as the inevitable outcome of the dialectic but as a "moral ideal" to be freely pursued, he was abused unmercifully by Trotsky. The notion that "moral ideals" should be put before the forces of history was anathema to Trotsky, the rigid Marxist, and he promptly read Burnham out of the party. (Dwight Macdonald, too, was coarsely rebuked for some similar peccadillo.) Trotsky's behavior was generally high-handed and authoritarian, and gave no reason to believe that, had he assumed power, the revolution would have gone any differently from the way it did. No matter, so far as Rahv was concerned; Trotsky had delivered him from the jaws of Stalinism and would thereafter remain a hero in his eyes.

His break with Communism also marked the real beginning of Rahv's career as a literary critic. Starting in 1939, and then through the 1940's, he wrote some solid and really first-rate essays in literary criticism, which still remain the best memorial to his powers of mind and sensibility. One of the remarkable things about them too was the degree to which his Marxism had receded into the background. In fact, he had not given up his beliefs; when pushed in conversation, the Marxist formulary would come out as flat and dogmatic as ever; but in his literary criticism, and much to its benefit, he seemed to look the other way. The god of Marxism had not died for him, it had simply withdrawn—and, as it turned out, only for a while. Nevertheless, when the faith of a believer recedes over a fairly long period, we sometimes expect that there may be a new readjustment at length. The surprising thing is that when Rahv's Marxist faith was reborn in the 1960's, it came back with the same simple and point-blank ferocity it had possessed in 1932 and 1934. Beside his edgings in that direction, in his persistent baiting of "anti-Communists" during the 1950's, which I have already noted, there was also the profound impact of the death of Stalin in 1953. Rahv was so fixed upon Stalin as the diabolic figure who had corrupted the revolution that he could not help believing that the death of the dictator would now restore the revolution to its pristine purity, and he began to look long-

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ingly for any least sign of liberalization in the Soviet regime. And even when, in his last years, he spoke of the necessity of a "political revolution" in the Soviet Union, he seems never to have imagined that such a revolution, if it were indeed to bring about liberty, would not so much have to complete as to sweep away the work of the October revolution.

Still, when one has noted these connecting links by way of a transition, his reversion to his original Marxist-Leninist faith was so stark and simple-minded—as if he had learned nothing in the intervening years—that it remains startling. It would be too easy, however, to attribute the relapse merely to a change in the times: the 1960's went leftist, and Rahv was swept along in it. After all, he had battled the *Zeitgeist* in the 1930's and 1940's, and conceivably he could have done so again. No; the source of the change has to be traced to deeper and more personal wellsprings in the man himself.

III

If Rahv's most memorable pieces of writing were done as a literary critic in relative independence of his political convictions, it might seem odd that I have begun this revaluation of him by plunging him so immediately and deeply into a political context. But, even as critic, Rahv was very much part of his actual world. To attempt to distill out the literary criticism, and regard it as something apart, would not give us a proper idea of his importance. To compare him, for example, simply as a literary critic with someone like Edmund Wilson would be both bizarre and belittling. Yet if we look at the comparison from another direction, the result may not be so belittling. It may come as a rather shocking paradox at first, but I think the claim might reasonably be defended that in his own particular way, and over a certain period, he probably had a more powerful influence than Wilson. True, his output was very, very slender in comparison, and he reached only a tiny fraction of the audience Wilson did; but his influence was more strategically located—on young intellectuals who went on to teach or write about literature themselves and who, though they might not have followed him to the letter and might even have found themselves very much in opposition, nevertheless took from him a certain direction in their own thinking, and thus propagated something of his influence.

Of course, this influence was inseparable from that of *Partisan Review* in its earlier and more vital days, but then we have to remember how much he himself shaped the line of that magazine. In his own view, each of his critical pieces, whatever intrinsic points it might make, was intended to reinforce the general attitude of mind for which the magazine stood and which he thought should be that of all intellectuals of our time. The word "line" may have an ominous ring here, which in the present case we ought to dismiss. Rahv did have a taste for power, and there were those who referred to him as aspiring to be a kind of cultural commissar. But though he relished the feeling of power, he would have been too indolent, had a socialist revolution taken over, to become a successful commissar. That would have required too much of his labor and his time, and drawn him away from what he preferred to do—which was to read books and from time to time comment upon them. That he loved literature was indeed one of his redeeming merits. There is, however, a perfectly legitimate sense in which a critic may seek to define a "line" with regard to any subject or author he is exploring. He wishes, after all, to establish some judgment that, even if it does not claim to be definitive, nevertheless marks out a path along which he wants to lead his readers. And it is because Rahv was so conscious of his public role, I think, that he has the critical virtues he does: his ability, at his best, was to bring together conflicting claims and strike some sort of judicious, sometimes even judicial, balance between them.

Consider, for example, the well-known essay "Paleface and Redskin," which explores the polar opposites in the American tradition—the cult of raw experience, on the one hand, and, on the other, the overgenteel pursuit of high culture without roots in the native soil. These points, or suggestions of them, had been made many times before and by numerous critics; but no one had brought the matter so compactly together as Rahv and placed it in judicious focus. The essay still stands up, as valid as when it first appeared in 1939. Of course, there remains the further question as to what might deepen our American life so that we could get beyond the impasse of these opposites. But that investigation would require from the critic the kind of beliefs and temperament, and indeed a commitment of feeling toward America, that Rahv did not have.

In a similar vein, of striking a delicate and perceptive balance, there is the fine essay, "Attitudes Toward Henry James," of 1943. Written during the Henry James boom, the essay had a dual function: on the one hand, James had been for years a neglected writer and it was necessary to bring him before the public and establish his claims of greatness, but, on the other hand, one had to avoid the excesses of the more rabid enthusiasts who would elevate James to a position he did not quite fit. And, once again, Rahv strikes the intelligent and judicious balance, and, moreover, with a gracefulness and delicacy of touch somewhat unusual for him. He had a tendency, when not careful, to slip into being heavy-handed; but here some of the polish and civility of James himself had rubbed off on him. However, when he returned to the same theme almost thirty years later, in "Henry James and His Cult" (1972), he had indeed become heavy-handed and doctrinaire

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with old age.*As his political views became more simplistic, his literary perceptions had become cruder; and in general his later writings show his powers to be declining. The subtleties of the later James now elude him. The instances with which he attacks the later novels seem to me singularly unconvincing and in some cases rather obtuse. He finds it "unlikely," for example, that a woman so sophisticated as Mme. de Vionnet in *The Ambassadors* should fall in love with so inconsequential a young man as Chad Newsome. As if any man on whom a woman bestowed her love had first to establish his worth and rank! As if the heartbreak of the whole thing in this particular case were not that an aging woman should love in a handsome, charming, if somewhat empty youth the whole overwhelming fact of her own fading youth! But this was an area of feeling, in life and in literature, in which Rahv was not quite at home. He once remarked to me years ago, when he was my mentor in things of the world, that "Women are dopes," referring particularly to their choice of men, and having in mind a certain woman who had taken up with a younger man whom Rahv judged to be very inferior to himself. He should have been better prepared, then, for James's heroine.

But it was the Russians, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who most deeply engaged him both as man and critic. On the face of it, the choice of these two as his favored authors, the ones on whom he expended his deepest critical energies, was rather a strange one for Rahv, since both writers hold that human life, without some central religious conviction at its core, is bankrupt. And on the subject of religion Rahv personally had the simple-mindedness of the village atheist. Perhaps the bond of childhood, the memories of Russian as his earliest language, held him emotionally close to them. In any case, Tolstoy—with his overwhelming simplicity and directness—was his ideal of what a writer should be. Though Rahv was a professed champion of modernism (that, after all, was one of the two key points—the avant-garde in literature and art, and Marxism in politics—with which he had launched *Partisan Review*), nevertheless he was really uncomfortable before some of the complex experimentations of the moderns, and he put up with them only as a matter of principle. With Tolstoy, however, he was at home; and his essay on the Russian master, "The Green Twig and the Black Trunk," is the most beautiful piece of writing he did, and to my mind one of the best short introductions to Tolstoy as a writer. But even in so fine a study one senses certain ideological limitations of the critic before his subject. Rahv insists on what he calls Tolstoy's rationalism, and this is accurate so far as it applies to that author's direct and literal—sometimes, indeed, literal-minded—approach to things, and to his rejection of the Russian Orthodox Church. But if we are to paste the label of rationalist on Tolstoy, what then are we to make of his *My Confession*, a work which in fact Rahv personally prized, but which is, if anything, a testimony to the inadequacy of reason? This short sketch, part autobiography and part essay, remains one of the most powerful human and philosophic documents of the 19th century, and quite central to our understanding of Tolstoy. And what do we get from it if not the picture of Tolstoy like a caged lion, pacing his cell back and forth from corner to corner, shut up in the prison that his reason implacably builds around him and from which it provides no exit? And Tolstoy is quite categorical as to the means of deliverance: only through the common and ordinary feelings of humankind, not through reason, is it possible for the individual to grasp the meaning of life and to experience the bond with the lives of others. But Rahv's own intellectual program did not assign any important place to feeling.

In the case of Dostoevsky, the differences between critic and author, in temperament and point of view, are so marked that one can only believe Rahv was held by the fascination of the opposite. He wrote five essays on Dostoevsky, more than on any other writer, and at the end of his life was supposed to be putting together a book on the great Russian. In the early essays he is able to contrive some intellectual scheme—the fable of the Grand Inquisitor, for example, is read as an analogue of Stalin's tyranny—that keeps the mind of the ideologue busy while the sensibility of the critic can go to work; indeed, it is something of a miracle that, given the critic's own intellectual assumptions, he could nevertheless come up with as many penetrating perceptions as he does. But this makeshift procedure does not work so well as he goes on: he misses the central point of *Crime and Punishment*, which is the hero's absolute dissociation of intellect and ordinary feeling (a point on which Rahv had made himself deliberately and programmatically blind). And in the final essays, the heavy hand of the Marxist ideologue takes over more and more, and Dostoevsky's vision of human brotherhood is looked upon as a kind of anticipation of socialism. The problem which Dostoevsky raises here is the old one of the relation between the reader's beliefs and his capacity for appreciation—a question that T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards used to debate in the case of Dante. One does not have to believe in the Russian Orthodox church to appreciate

* The present collection reprints this later essay, but omits the earlier one—which is a great pity.

As for the political selections in this volume, there is one very glaring omission, and that is Rahv's exchange with Dwight Macdonald and Clement Greenberg (somewhere around 1940) on the question of supporting the war against Hitler. This was one clear-cut case where, facing historic actuality, Rahv abandoned the rigidity of the Marxian purist and declared for the war against the Nazis. His argument there, moreover, is very pertinent to the present struggle of America with the Soviet Union.

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Dostoevsky, but one does need to have enough sympathy with the religious attitude to enter into his characters at any sufficient depth. It will not do to speak superficially of his "psychological" interest as if he were presenting us with a clinical collection of abnormal cases. The point about his abnormal cases is that each is, in however grotesque and distorted form, an individual soul seeking salvation.

The same problem presents itself also in Rahv's fine essay on Kafka. Here again, the critic seems to have gone out of his way to find an author who is a stumbling block to his own Marxist ideology —unless you are willing to come out with the old stupidity that Kafka is merely describing the horror of life under capitalism. Moreover, Kafka presents the problem of art and neurosis in an acute form, since the neurotic elements are patent and widespread through his work. Rahv attempts to solve the problem by coming up with the tag that Kafka, more than a neurotic artist, succeeds by becoming "the artist of neurosis." This is a clever ploy, but it leaves unanswered the question of what neuroses are significant in a work of art and what makes them significant. A writer like Iris Murdoch, for example, can lead us through a whole gallery of neurotics; and much as we may admire the intelligence and skill of their author, we reach a point where her characters begin to bore us: we wish they would take their seamy little neurotic tics out into the garden and bury them. We can hardly speak of neuroses in Kafka on that level. Kafka was a man with a strangely dislocated vision and a vast and unappeased spiritual longing, and it is the conjunction of these qualities that gives the nuclear image of his fables their disturbing power. Dostoevsky was both a greater writer and a more completely realized man, and therefore more consciously and explictly in possession of his own religious motif. And that motif is central to his whole work: his characters hunger for a personal salvation that no secular institution or arrangement of society can bring. And unless we as readers can share that longing to some degree in our own imagination, we do not fully respond to him as a writer.

But there is another and more intimate aspect of Rahv's relationship to Dostoevsky that provokes my curiosity. When one has immersed oneself in an author very long, one sometimes has the uncanny feeling that he as writer is gazing back at you as reader, and this is particularly so when his vision is as penetrating and disquieting as Dostoevsky's. Poor Delmore Schwartz, for example, who was constantly reading some part or other of *The Brothers Karamazov*, always felt the eye of Dostoevsky upon him. Sometimes he would read aloud, with quivering voice, certain passages that expressed his own unsatisfied religious longings; at other times, stung by remembrance of some outrageous behavior of his own, he would shout out with Dostoevsky, "What a scoundrel I am!" Did Philip Rahv ever feel the Dostoevskian gaze staring back at him, looking through the defenses of his critical mind into the depths of his soul? And what would it have found? I think it would have discovered the nihilist lurking there.

For Rahv was a nihilist, perhaps the most outspoken in his own peculiar fashion that I have ever known. He had an abysmally low view of people and their motives, and usually found their alleged ideals bogus or unconvincing. He was, however, a nihilist who could enjoy himself, for he was not insensitive to pleasures. He relished his own creature comforts immensely; and when he was in a good mood, he could exude joviality. But of the deeper satisfactions of life, or what ordinary people take such satisfactions to be, he had found none that he trusted. "People talk so much about love," he snorted at me once. "There is either Christian love or sexual love. Do they mean Christian love? Who's capable of that? And as for sexual love—that only brings more tensions and anxiety." These nihilistic diatribes did not get into his writing; there he was taken over by his *persona*, the public role of judicious critic that was his to fulfill; but in his private conversations he let the destructive impulse reign free and unchecked. *Schadenfreude* was one of his favorite words; and he delighted to spot this joy in destruction as it masqueraded in others, but he had a more than generous dose of it himself—indeed, so frankly and openly so at times that it was almost engaging. When Delmore Schwartz, Clement Greenberg, and William Phillips, who at the time were all associated with him on *Partisan Review*, confronted him one day with the accusation that he had been dissecting their characters much too openly in the wrong places, and demanded to know, "Why do you do it?," Philip rather stopped them in their tracks by answering blandly, "Analytic exuberance." (That phrase, incidentally, became one of the treasured bits in Delmore's collection, launching him into giggles whenever he trotted it out privately. "Analytic exuberance," Delmore would say, "Philip Rahv's euphemism for putting a knife in your back.") The satisfactions in life that meant most to Rahv, I believe, were those of the ego, of fame, rank, prestige. All is vanity, says the nihilist, except my own vanity; but Rahv could find no solace even there, for he knew more than most how slippery and elusive a thing reputation was in the literary marketplace, where the caprice of critics and of fashion reigns.

THESE dark outpourings were not confined to his black moods, frequent enough in any case, but were the regular run of his conversation even when he seemed cheerful. One occasion comes back sharply to mind, because there was a hearer present less inured to the ways of his pessimism and therefore more sensitive to its utter bleakness; and also because something Rahv said at one moment was to turn out prophetic of the last act of his life that was to

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mystify friends and foes alike. My wife and I were sitting on a bench in Washington Square, relaxing in the sunshine of a lovely spring day, when Rahv happened by and joined us. He seemed to be in a good mood, visibly enjoying the weather, and very soon in his own forceful way had taken over the conversation. But as he launched himself on the full tide of his eloquence, he struck his usual vein and before long was wreaking a trail of destruction about him right and left. His particular theme this time was the tepidness and lack of conviction in the whole American scene. And suddenly he had shot out, with a different and more yearning voice, "I wish I were in Israel. At least, people there believe in something." This was in the late 1940's, when Israel was struggling for statehood, and the heroism of that struggle had evidently touched some deeper and less cynical part of his being. Presently, having exhausted his topics of lamentation, and perhaps his hearers too, Rahv cheerfully said goodbye and left. My wife, who had seen him only on more formal social occasions and was unprepared for this destructiveness of his casual talk, looked aghast: "He leaves the whole world black after him," as if he had suddenly banished the brightness of the spring day. She shuddered: "How does he live with himself?"

How does he live with himself? Well, he was young, just pushing forty at the time, with enough exuberance and energy to feed his conflicts, and with enough that was going on in the literary scene, however he might sneer at it, to keep mind and hand busy. But the question—how does he live with himself?—was one that kept coming back to me when I tried to imagine him in his later years at Brandeis, where he had gone to teach toward the end of the 50's, alone, visibly aging, and—according to my informants—more somber than ever. His wife had perished in a frightful accident. He remarried, but the marriage was unhappy and very short-lived; and he was left in a loneliness beyond any he had ever known before. How did he live with himself? Given his views of human beings and human life, what solace could he find against loneliness and encroaching death? I think it is not hard to find an answer to these questions. He did have something to interpose between himself and the void: a simple-minded, complete, and sustaining faith, his Marxism, which had never left him and into which he could now relapse completely. That containing framework was with him in his first reviews in the *New Masses* in the early 1930's, continued unchanged though it was pushed into the background during the 1940's and 1950's, and then in the 1960's came very decidedly into the forefront again. During those intervening years he performed a prodigious labor of self-education, polishing and sharpening his literary perceptions, but he never turned these critical energies of mind upon the dogma of his own Marxism. That would remain as it had always been, a simple and comprehensive explanation of the world, above all *unquestioned*, so that it could have the redeeming stability of religious faith. It even permitted him to be saved such as he was, to put it in the old Quaker fashion: for he could be redeemed and still continue as the person he was, railing in his atrabilious humor at the evils of this world because he had faith in a better one to come.

Thus these questions of deepest personal attitudes bring us back to the political questions with which we began this memoir.

IV

Moreover, these personal attitudes, if we pursue them far enough, turn out to be central to the whole question of socialism itself. What we think human beings are like, what we imagine their moral capacities to be, are surely not questions irrelevant to the kind of social order we would devise for them; and political philosophers from Aristotle to James Madison have insisted on the initial consideration of human nature as a central concern for social theory. The paradox in Rahv was that he had the lowest possible view, indeed a kind of Swiftian pessimism, about human beings together with a utopian faith in socialism. How do you put the two together? How can they be put together? How can a nihilism about human life be joined with a utopian politics? The simplicity of his Marxist faith would say that people were bad because society had made them bad: they were petty, mean, and vicious because they lived under a capitalist order. (I doubt that Rahv, the perceptive reader of novels and constant observer of people, ever really believed this fairy tale; when he was launched on one of his dissections of some person we knew, "capitalism" was never an explanatory term he made use of to expose particular foibles of character.) Socialism, then, would change human nature, and people would become or be made to become virtuous. But surely such a profound transformation could not come overnight; and during that interregnum between human corruption and its socialist redemption, what would prevent the corrupt elements from taking over the new order and even continuing permanently in the saddle? This problem becomes all the more apposite if we consider, among the more questionable aspects of our questionable human nature, the fierceness of the power drive that can take possession of people whenever given the chance. But on the problem of power Rahv thought only in fits and starts, sometimes in intense spasms, but he never put his thoughts consistently together.

Thus he was much taken by George Orwell's *1984* when it first appeared in the late 1940's, and particularly by the bitter and startling words Orwell put into the mouth of the police chief O'Brien: *"Power is not a means; it is an end. . . . The object of persecution is persecution. The*

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object of torture is torture. The object of power is power." As Rahv never wrote from the top of his head, so he never read in that fashion either; if a book took hold of him, he carried it explosively and oratorically into his conversation. The effect could be contagious and engaging, though sometimes one's ears were a little deafened. He read or recited O'Brien's speech at me several times, and then added grimly: "That's the real truth about power, but people don't want to admit it." There was even a certain satisfaction in his tone, as if here for a moment mendacious human nature had let the mask fall and admitted the truth about itself.

But if this be the truth about human nature, then it is very bad news indeed for socialism. The socialist arrangement of society requires at the least an extraordinary concentration of power simply that government may take over the whole economy; and given the drive to power for power's sake, what under this setup can keep the impulse to power from running amok? Rahv had never pondered Madison on this point: that a chief aim of government, besides securing what powers it needs in order to operate, is to limit those powers as a safeguard against the possible usurpation of power. (Incidentally, it is interesting in our present context to notice that Madison based his point here on a certain pessimism about human nature: "If men were angels, government [viz., with its limitations upon power] would be unnecessary.") The best bulwark against the fearful lust for power in some individuals is to maintain plural and competing centers of power, which are hardly possible when the economic and political sectors are under a unified command. But Rahv remained innocent of such theoretical questions, as he remained innocent of political theory generally; indeed, he chose to remain innocent.

"Genius," Nietzsche once remarked, "is a will to stupidity"; and on this feature alone Rahv would certainly qualify. Nietzsche had in view a certain type of mind so intent on its own purposes that it closes the doors on other perspectives or influences that might deflect it from those purposes. It is understandable that Rahv should never glance at classical political thought—that, after all, belonged to the "bourgeois" world—but it is surprising that he never delved much into Marxist theorizing either. Most of us at one time or another had taken a crack at Marx's *Capital*, and some of us even managed to stumble through that heavy tome, seeking scientific underpinnings for our conviction. But Rahv never turned his mind that way; the simplest formulations were enough to satisfy him and hold him fast in his faith. The power of his mind was toward a certain concreteness, and he had not only an inability in relation to, but a positive antipathy toward, abstract ideas. When, for example, his exploration of the Russian writers drew him toward Existentialism, he deliberately sought me out for some conversations on the subject, but I would notice that past a certain point of abstractness his mind would immediately turn off. And he was right in this—right for his own purposes: he had his own antecedent perceptions, and he wanted simply to gather whatever might give them further resonance and depth. But this habit of mind that worked well in his literary criticism did not succeed so well in the area of political philosophy, where the turning away from theoretical questions and qualifications made his thought not more concrete, but schematic and abstract.

YET beneath the crustiness of advancing age, and the doctrinaire rigidity that had set in, something still remained of his literary tact. In the present collection there is a review which I had not previously seen, of T. S. Eliot's posthumous essays, and which I expected, in view of Rahv's mood in this later period, to be a programmatic manhandling of its subject. It turns out, however, to be appreciative, finely perceptive, and gracious too. Rahv, perhaps despite himself at this period, was still too intelligent not to recognize in Eliot the supreme literary intelligence of the century. He even excuses Eliot for his religious views: "His commitment to orthodox beliefs must have answered an irresistible inner demand of his nature for a discipline to shore him up against chaos. . . . In this sense it was no more than an anodyne, yet we who have not suffered his pains are seldom in a position to reproach him."

But why limit such charitable tolerance to Eliot? We may not suffer his pains, but we have our own; and for each man his own pains outweigh anyone else's; so that by this same line of reasoning the right to believe should not be confined aristocratically to the great poet and critic but extended democratically to everyman—and we would end thus with a much more reasonable and tolerant view of religion than Rahv was ever intellectually willing to concede. And in such a charitable mood, which he himself for a moment advances, we may very well include Philip Rahv himself: we can humanly and charitably sympathize with the desperation, the struggle against chaos, which led him in advancing age to clutch his Marxist gods more fiercely and rigidly than ever, even if we cannot quite condone his choice of those particular gods, since they are the ones that the present generation will have to do battle with.

And something else, something more human than literary, seems to have remained for him. As a final act, in his will he left his money to the state of Israel. As the final touch to round off his life, this gesture has puzzled many. For myself, I see it against that afternoon years ago in Washington Square, when in the midst of our conversation he suddenly spoke about Israel, and another voice, more youthful and yearning, sounded through all the cynical postures of the ideologue. I like to think that voice was still there, and at the end it broke through again.

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Samson: A Pseudepigraphical Jest

Roger Kaplan

The story of Samson, son of Manoah of the tribe of Dan, as handed down to us in our years and centuries of wandering in Edom, in Provence, Galicia, Lithuania, and Illinois, since the days when it was first related in the Book of Judges.

JUDGES XIII:1 These were ordinary days, the days in which this story takes place, days that saw too little moral fiber and remembrance of what it is man's destiny to do or at least try to do as it has been revealed to him by God and taught to him by our teacher Moses, days in which the people of Israel sinned: going after other gods and selling themselves and their fellows to enrich themselves and satisfy their lust or distinguish themselves and satisfy their vanity; they did many of the abominable things which men are capable of and which God hates; and indeed He was unhappy with them for He allowed the Philistines to overrun the beautiful country which He had given them, making it unclean, reintroducing their false gods upon its soil, and, worst of all, making a bad example for the children: for all of four long and painful decades.

—:2-7 Manoah, a man from Zorah who belonged to the tribe of Dan, was unhappy with this state of affairs, for although he sometimes overlooked the dietary laws, he was a righteous man and knew corruption when he saw it, but being no prophet, he hoped only to pass on what he knew to a son; unfortunately, his wife could not give him one, nor even a daughter for that matter. God remembered him and sent one of His plenipotentiaries to his wife to tell her that in good enough time she would bear a son. This is a serious responsibility, he said, so cut out all drinking and keep a strictly kosher kitchen. Never let the boy get a haircut, for he is to be a Nazirite: one dedicated to the service of the Lord and to the deliverance of his people. The woman, who after all did not have experiences of this sort every day, went to tell her husband about it, explaining that, perhaps because of the consternation, she had not caught his name or domicile. To make up for that, she went on at some length about how he had told her to be circumspect in her culinary activities, and that the boy was to be a Nazirite, God's servant from birth to death.

[XIII:1]

Ordinary days: Not that it is normal and proper that men should be weak and unfaithful, but that most men do not heed the commandments and therefore days ordinarily have more evil men than good waking up into them. They sought riches and vanities because these seem to be the good things of life, whereas they are but the ordinary thing to seek and the truly good things are found in the observance of the commandments, and to do this is reckoned extraordinary, for most men do not understand it, since clearly most days have more evil in them than good.

The abominable things: There are too many to list, therefore, He does not remind you of them all; but also: because He knows you know what they are, for the good man knows what is evil yet chooses not to do it, for he loves the reason which the Master of the Universe has given him.

False gods: The Philistines were people beyond the sea, yet since all false gods are evil, it is always a reintroduction of evil to worship one or more of them, for it is always to forget the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt.

Four decades: For this was after the death of Abdon and his mighty sons and grandsons, when there was no one to stop them. Also: for Noah stayed forty days imperiled by the flood, yet he was being saved for better times.

[—:2-7]

God remembered him: Thus the Lord smiles on the man who strives to walk in His ways, even though he may be in part delinquent.

One of His Plenipotentiaries: Messenger is the same word as angel, and this was done for Abraham before Sarah begat Isaac, but she only saw one messenger because her husband was not as great as Abraham.

To cut out all drinking and eat clean foods: This is to teach us that food is primarily a divine gift that must be partaken of in holiness; and also, for one who will fight ardent battles, kosher food builds stronger bodies.

Went to tell her husband; She told her husband because what else does a wife do? Also, because to have such a boy is cause for both pride and sorrow, for although he would bring deliverance to his people as a hand of the Almighty, yet such an unusual son might cause his parents unforeseeable grief on account of the strange things his mission might require him to do.

Culinary activities: It was not the season for it but she got to work fast putting her kitchen in order.

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—:8-14 Apprehensive but obedient, Manoah asked God to send the messenger a second time, that he might better understand how to raise his son. God is always willing to teach patiently him who is willing to learn, so He sent His messenger out again, who met Manoah's wife while she was alone in the field. She hurried to fetch Manoah, for she was a good woman and did not like to be alone with single men. Manoah asked the angel if he was the same one who had appeared previously and was told yes indeed. When we get a boy, said Manoah, how are we to educate him? *Dixitque angelus Domini ad Manue: Ab omnibus, quae locutus sum uxori tuae, abstineat se.* She must not, he told him as he had told her, drink wine or eat unclean food.

—:15-20 Manoah asked the divine diplomat to allow them to put him up for dinner. But he said, rather shortly, that he would have none of their food, and if they wanted to roast some meat, they should do it as an offering to God. Still just a bit skeptical, Manoah asked his visitor his name, that he might praise him in the future. The other explained that it is not possible to know the name of one so wondrous as He who was about to work the miracle in which they themselves would partake; it is sufficient to try to understand His manifestations, or at least recognize them....Manoah offered the sacrifice. The angel went toward heaven with the flames, provoking in the parents-to-be a burst of piety.

—:21-25 Upon much reflection, it came to Manoah that they had been face to face with God's own angel. He thought they had seen God, and told his wife this could only mean they were bound to die. Her sense was better than his this time and she pointed out that if God had death in store for them He would not have done all this or accepted their sacrifice. And indeed she was right in her trust, for in due course she gave birth to a son, whom she called Samson; and the child received the Lord's blessing. As he grew and began to explore the country around Mahanehdan, he began to feel himself called upon to serve God, and he also saw there was in these parts much bad news for the Jews.

XIV:1-3 While on a trip to Timnah with the wrestling team of his yeshivah, of which he was the captain, Samson, who was also an excellent student and who would, everyone thought, make a fine rabbi, was attracted to a pretty Philistine girl, and while no one is saying there were no pretty girls among the Philistines, one may ask why they had to parade vulgarly on the beaches of Gaza, if not to bring good boys like Samson to ruin, who, to be sure, had every reason to return the compliment, for he was by now tall and handsome, with a proud demeanor crowned by his striking long hair. It must have been an unhappy day for the parents when he asked them squarely to get the girl for him, as he wanted to marry her, although he knew perfectly well she could not possibly make him a nice clean

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[—8-14]

Apprehensive: For he was not sure he could trust the woman's reason, as barrenness is known to derange a woman.

A second time: Only the Master of the Universe can do the same thing twice.

She was alone in the field: For her husband was occupying himself with study.

Dixitque: He spoke in Church Latin, for God has agents who express themselves in every language on earth, even though He revealed Himself in Hebrew, for all His children are loved equally by Him. This also teaches us that Manoah was no fool, but having mastered Tanakh, Midrash, Mishna, and Gemara, he was now busily learning the language of Aquinas in order to refute his propositions on Maimonides blessed be his memory (viz., *Summa,* 1.A.13.2, etc.); interested in his progress, the Almighty sent this fellow to quiz him. But he did not answer his question because education comes all in its own good time and first things first: learn to be a parent.

[—:15-20]

For dinner: He was being hospitable, but the angel reminded him that it was to the Nameless One that he owed all thanks and praises, yet He looks kindly upon those who welcome His messengers, therefore you should always invite a stranger to your table on the Sabbath, for it is good to do so, and also you may learn something that way.

To understand His Manifestations: Why indeed seek the Name when His works are enough to make new each day of the man who will keep his eyes and ears open?

A burst of piety: Despite the distinguished views of some of the *Religionswissenschaft* boys, this hardly signifies the reappearance of archaic beliefs.

[—:21-25]

They had seen God: He mistook the sent for the Sender. Another interpretation: he thought he had dreamed himself as important as Abraham, and thought he must die for such presumption.

Her sense: Because now that she was with child, she became calmer. As the Holy One said, so He remembered the boy who was from the womb dedicated to Him. It was because the Creator blessed him that Samson felt this, and it was the Creator who opened his eyes, as he walked about, to what had befallen the country. But you cannot want to serve the Lord and not be concerned about what is happening to His people.

[XIV:1-3]

A trip: Although the Philistines and the children of Jacob were not friends, even with your enemies it is better to play sports than to make war.

A Philistine girl: Surely one of those who came to watch the youths compete, hoping to catch them in immodest positions and seduce them by looking at them in a certain way. This is to teach us that *haskala* or no, there is a limit to the profit to be obtained from studying the ways of Edom.

An unhappy day: Manoah must indeed have grieved, but he would not disown his son or say Kaddish for him, since he knew he was in the hands of the Master of the Universe whose ways are inscrutable, neither therefore did he despair and turn from his righteous ways.

Squarely: Samson spoke arrogantly to his father because he was young and in love with a woman, which will make a man do anything; but also because he was not entirely happy about being who he was, as is shown by this choice.

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home like his mother's. They did not fail to express their shock that he should choose a Gentile over one of his own kind and they asked him how he could want the daughter of uncircumcised Philistines—a question that had no effect on him, since he had, it must be admitted, a marked weakness for a certain vulgar type of femininity.

—:4 Indeed; but what his parents failed to realized, and perhaps Samson did not realize it either at the time, was that there was a certain historical logic in this shocking preference, or perhaps one could simply say that God knows what He is doing: and in these days He was sad for the Philistines ruled over much of *Eretz Israel.*

—:5-10 Accompanied by his parents, Samson went back to Timnah (which, to add insult to injury, was a wine-growing district), and on the way he was attacked by a young lion who should have turned any ordinary wrestling champion into a star sprinter. Instead, the danger provoked a heavy dose of the divine inspiration and, with his bare hands, Samson tore the regal beast apart, so coolly that he had no need to unburden himself by telling his parents about it. He continued and visited the girl, and he let her turn his head (no doubt she offered him a quick preview of their nuptial night right then and there). Paying her another call soon afterward, he took a look at his lion and noticed that the carcass had become a beehive and the bees in it were making honey. Samson took the honey and ate it as he walked, and when he saw his parents he gave some of it to them, without telling them where it came from.

—:10-14 Manoah went to prepare the marriage contract while Samson prepared the nuptial feast—a very important custom among the Philistines, and expected of the groom—thinking that he would outdo anything they had ever seen. What he did not count on was that there would be thirty best men, since it was also the custom that the groom provide for them, and Samson realized that his gesture was being abused. Not wanting to appear a spoil-sport, Samson suggested that a riddle be posed by him: should they crack it, he would provide their party attire; otherwise, they should give him as much as he would have given them: a defiant thing to say, for Samson was determined that his marriage should not be interpreted as philo-philistinism; so the young toughs said to Samson to produce the riddle. Samson's riddle was this: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet"—but after three days of thinking they could not figure it out, which left them four days.

Their shock: For had he not grown up in a clean home?

Weakness: Bright as he was, foremost in his mind always was his pleasure, and Samson preferred the short-range benefits of a vulgar woman to the long-range happiness that a woman of valor would bring him.

[—:4]

A certain historical logic: Mysterious are the ways of the Creator, but to defeat your enemy it is better you know him well. Also: you can never do your duty except as you are serving yourself, even though your self-service is ultimately self-destructive (which prevents you from doing your duty).

[—:5-10]

No need to unburden himself: He did not tell them about the lion because he had already ceased to be an obedient son. But how could they not see if they were with him? Because Manoah was saying the afternoon prayers, while his wife rested, but Samson had gone ahead. No: it is true Samson was not a stickler for filial obedience, but give him credit for not wanting to shock his parents with this barbaric story. Wrong: Samson had no thought for anyone's feelings but his own.

Divine inspiration: Great strength, but do not mistake every instance of great strength for divine inspiration. What do you think we are, idiots?

So coolly: His own strength may have surprised him, but in the moment of combat he had no thoughts at all, least of all of running for it, for Samson's personality and his strength were really two distinct things. Don't get so smart with your psychology.

Quick preview: She sensed better than he his indecision, so she helped him decide by making him lustful.

Honey: He took the honey even though he knew it must be unclean, for he thought: if I am going to get a Philistine girl, why should I keep kosher? This is to teach us that the commandments are kept together. But he did not tell his parents for he did not want an argument with them. Yes? And maybe he did have some feelings for them after all? The commandments are like the bones of the body: without even one, you are as a cripple.

[—:10-14]

Went to prepare: He was distraught, but he did what a father must do, for he believed in the message that had been sent to him, and he had studied to advantage the story of Abraham and Isaac.

The nuptial feast: For the Philistines preferred pleasure to study and their weddings were given over to drunken debauch instead of being occasions to marvel and rejoice in the works of the Creator.

Thirty: Very low class, they sought to show that any of thirty could just as easily have won the girl's heart, but they were fools, for they only showed it would take more than thirty of them to handle one like him.

A riddle: What hangs on the wall, is green, and whistles? Another: what do you say when two elephants are seen walking down Michigan Avenue wearing identical T-shirts? For everything Samson did was a riddle unto himself: who loves the daughters and kills their brothers?

The eater: The lion. Another interpretation: the Philistines.

The strong: The lion. Or again: the bees.

They could not figure: For all bullies are softbrained.

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—:15-20 Bullies think that force will do when reason fails, but being low cowards basically, they exerted their force—which was mostly in the form of very nasty threats—on the weak betrothed, telling her plainly that if she did not get the answer from Samson, they would burn her and her father's house as well. She thought she knew what was good for her and went to Samson and implored him in a whiny voice to tell her the riddle, claiming that his not telling her the answer implied he did not love her, whereas, as he pointed out to her, he had not even told his parents. For the seven days of the feast she kept up this phony tune, and Samson, who like many men who like women but do not understand them thought her tears worth worrying about, gave in and told her: at which exact point she stopped talking about love and went to tell her countrymen the answer. Just in time to win the game they went to Samson with it: "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" Samson understood easily enough what had occurred, replying: "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle." A deep sense of shame came over Samson and he saw how much was to be gained by acting in good faith with these people; at the same time, a wonderful strength filled his body, and he rushed into Ashkelon, a neighboring city full of Philistines, there to kill thirty of them and bring their festive attire to those who had found the answer to his riddle; still steaming, he went home to his father's. His wife, meanwhile, was given to the best man at the wedding.

JUDGES XV:1-8 Not long afterward, at a time of the year when men feel generous and peaceful—the time of the wheat harvest—Samson went back to Timnah for a visit, bringing his wife a kid and expecting (for bygones will be bygones) that it was about time she made him one, so imagine his consternation when his father-in-law barred him from the kidding room. "Look," he said, "after what happened at the wedding, I thought you would hate her for good, and I gave her to one of those dumb jocks; take her younger sister instead: is she not even prettier?" "All right," replied Samson in cold fury, "this time when I break the furniture no one will be able to say it was my fault." He caught, for he was swift, three hundred foxes, and tied their tails like garlands with a torch bound in each knot. With the torches set afire, he let the beasts loose among the food stores of the Philistines, destroying the shocks of wheat and the grain as well as the olive orchards. Needing a scapegoat, the Philistine rabble persuaded itself that none of this would have happened if the girl had not gone with the other man, conveniently forgetting the circumstances in which she did so, and they murdered Samson's Philistine family by fire. Samson

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[—:15-20]

Bullies: Like the Macedonian, who killed many Persians before persuading them to become his subjects. They were certainly cowards, since they were prepared to bring arson to one of their own but would not go against Samson directly; and is this not the characteristic of the weak?

What was good for her: She thought it better to save her life than to save her husband, but if a woman does that, who will protect her?

He did not love her: Either she did not know what love is, or knew he didn't.

Told his parents: He means, what has the answer to do with love, and whom could he love better than his mother and father?

Seven days: Yet it was on the fourth day that it started, but because his wife was a shrew and had changed her character as soon as he married her, she had been crying already for three days.

Men who like women: To love many women is to fail to know what love is, as Don Juan. To love only one woman is to understand, to the point of causing her necessary pain: thus Tristan. Please cut out these *maskil* references.

Plowed with my heifer: For when they came to ask the riddle of her, they lay with her, for they considered her a whore to go with an Israelite, and thought all the Israelites had they could take and use.

At the same time: So that we may learn that the Master of the Universe is present even when we are most obsessed with ourselves: he took the insult personally but he understood it to mean there was still war to the death between his people and the Philistines, and only then did the Spirit of the Lord come to him, allowing him to defeat thirty men in combat.

Home to his father's: It was customary in those days to stay home until he and she had their own house. It was only when she was with him that they abused her, or her father would not have given her to the best man; thus there was some logic to her betraying him. But even if Samson betrayed his people, they would still hate him, indeed, they would even hate his children.

[XV:1-8]

Bygones: Some say that to seek reconciliation is foolish and invites contempt. That may be so, yet we are enjoined to try. Then at least only do it from a position of strength.

Hate her for good: The Philistine father had no concept of man's capacity to forgive. And we, do we not forgive too readily?

Take her younger sister: Still, was he not a man of peace, for giving his younger daughter to an Israelite to avoid a fight over the elder? That is like being offered Madagascar after being promised *Eretz Israel.*

My fault: When a man is insulted even as he is wronged, he may say that it is within his rights to seek revenge no less than restitution. But did not Samson prepare to do greater harm to the Philistines than had been done to him? In this was he not wrong? No, for the Philistines had wronged his people many times and stolen their grain and produce.

Swift: For how else could he outrun a fox? Why, by outfoxing him, and this teaches us that Samson was mighty of mind as well as of body. Unfortunately, it seems his id was mightiest of all.

Among the food stores: Samson had to be struck personally before he struck back, but he always thought of hurting the Philistines as they hurt his people and not only him.

Needing a scapegoat: It was unlike the Philistines to consider themselves to blame for their own troubles.

By fire: Like Cossacks.

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was amazed, but said: "One last time I owe you some change, and after that I am through with you." He destroyed a great many of them with his mighty blows, making mincemeat of their backbones and puree of their profiles; and with no further ado, in sorrow as much as in hatred, he went to a solitary, rocky place he knew at Etam.

—:9-13 In their usual sneaky, treacherous, hit-the-weak-to-hurt-the-strong style, the Philistines sent a raiding party of goons to Lehi, a town in Judah not far from Beth-shemesh. "What have we done this time?" asked the men of Judah, and the Philistines told them that they had come for Samson, to do to him, they said, as he had done to them. Not wanting trouble, the men of Judah put together a delegation of 3,000 men to go fetch Samson at Etam, where he was still hanging out, and they said: "We're disappointed in you, Samson; don't you know who's boss around here? Are you trying to ruin us?" "I hadn't noticed this was a golden age," replied Samson with lonely pride, "As they did to me I did to them." They were not prepared for the inspirational gesture, and they said, "Sorry Samsele, but the law's the law, and we must tie you up and turn you in to the authorities"; and while muttering, Whose law? under his breath, he replied: "Okay girls, I'll come along if I have your word that you are not planning any tricks behind my back." "Tricks?" said they. "Samson, no one wants to hurt you." And they tied him with two new strong ropes and led him from the rock.

—:14-17 The arrival of Samson, bound by his own people, in Lehi, provoked a great deal of mirth among the Philistine rabble, who began to jump up and down in anticipation of the pleasure of killing him by slow torture; but at that very moment, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson with a mighty rush and he snapped his ropes with one flexing of his muscles. It was time again to fight, and seeking a weapon (Spirit of the Lord or no, this was no picnic), Samson found the tough jawbone of what must have been a stubborn ass, and with his back to the wall to avoid encirclement, he fought all afternoon until 1,000 of the scoundrels lay dead around him. Surveying the grim field, Samson said, "In Lehi, with a *lehi*, of an ass have I made asses." Then he threw away the *lehi*, and that is why the place was called Ramath-lehi.

—:18-20 After all this, not surprisingly, the champion was parched, and he called to God: "I much appreciate the way you let me save my people in Lehi and then die of thirst so my carcass will fall into the hands of Edom." In answer, God created a spring, and it was called En-hakkor. After this, the people caught on, and rather than call him a troublemaker or an idealist, they followed his example of resistance and liberation, and he judged Israel twenty years.

Amazed: Would an Israelite ever commit such a crime?

A great many: As many as were there. But he meant thereby to put an end to it, for he felt debased fighting such low rascals.

A solitary place: After this he had need of psychic recuperation and analysis. No: he went where he could ask the Holy One to forgive him for what he had been forced to do but found no joy in doing, nor did he need to brag to anyone about his deed.

[—:9-13]

Their usual...style: They could attack Lehi because they knew the men there were not like Samson and would not fight back. But why not? Because the Spirit of the Lord was not with them. Perhaps they did not know that the Spirit of the Lord was with them. They thought it must be something they had done, not that there must be something wrong with the others.

Not wanting trouble: If you keep trying to hide from trouble it will only get worse. It had not occurred to them yet that with 3,000 men they could resist the enemy and they did not realize Samson was an example to them to rise up and defend the freedom of their own land. And note that with 3,000 men they could have burned all the Philistine cities from Tyre to Marjayoun. That they tried to cut a deal teaches us that the Creator gave us our reason to be reasonable. And so to cut a deal with unreasonable people, is that not stupid?

"As they did to me": Samson was no orator, but he knew that anyway their political consciousness was insufficiently developed for a harangue to have any consequence; still, he was ashamed of their pusillanimity.

Whose law?: He knew only two: God's and love's: the first saved him from the troubles the second brought him. But he could not respect as authorities an arsoning murdering lynch mob. He was deeply pained, for he knew they knew what they in their abject vassalage were doing.

[—:14-17]

In anticipation of the pleasure: A most unpleasant situation, to be in the hands of sadists with no sense of due process, and it happens to the best of them.

The Spirit: It came to him when he saw his people's enemy, but also, obviously, when he saw danger to himself. More simply put: the Creator had no intention of abandoning him when his mission was but hardly begun.

Time again to fight: No easy matter, his advantage notwithstanding; there were so many more of them.

A weapon: He had the lead on them in technology, but remember they could learn to use jawbones too and obtain them from guess-where. His choice of weapon shows that you use a tool that fits the task, but also one that is appropriate for the place, as we learn from the following verse.

Asses: So to speak. Note that he means dead asses. Oh-ho, such insight, we have a *gaon* among us!

Threw away: For what should he keep it? He was not like those who love the sport more than the duty and could perform the sport for any master. Why the pun? An attempt to mask his anger. And his sorrow. And his confusion? Perhaps, too, his confusion.

[—:18-20]

Much appreciate: Perhaps it angered him to find that the Creator was with him when it took 1,000 deaths to do His will, and now where was He when what His servant needed was a lousy drink of water? It was that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not forget His servant's thirst, but He also wanted him to remember that he must always call upon Him, even for small things.

The people caught on: In short, they saw that he was a realist.

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JUDGES XVI:1-3 In Gaza, Samson fell for a prostitute of vulgar beauty and could not resist going to her, for though his judging was good, his personal behavior displayed at times some of the lack of measure and taste that had characterized him since adolescence. The Gazites (another variety of low Philistine rabble) were informed that Samson was in the brothel and they prepared to ambush him, figuring that if they surrounded the city, they could jump him in the morning when, after an active night, he would not be at his most alert. But all these years of guerrilla activity had not been wasted on him (though, necessarily, he had not found the time to become so accomplished a scholar as his father), and, smelling a rat, he cut his pleasure short at midnight (which took some effort since that meant missing the grand-concourse treatment) and disappeared, taking with him the doors of the gate of the city, carrying them on his shoulders as far as the hill before Hebron.

—:4-5 And still there was something in Philistine women that Samson, after these many years, found irresistible, there was something about them—when they were his type—that still overpowered his senses, perhaps his memory of that first great love that he still wished had not been spoiled, perhaps some heartfelt need to believe that not all Philistines wanted to kill him, or perhaps it was their damned provocative way of dressing, and it was in the cards that when he saw her, dressed in the thinnest silk, head bare, talking with passion of a new international order of cooperation and brotherhood, he would fall for the beautiful Delilah of Sorek. And, in all fairness to her, who is to say she did not fall for him to the degree that she could? He was her kind of man, lusty and mighty with his dagger and his swagger, the handsomest and the strongest, the only one fit for her; however, there was one thing Delilah of Sorek loved better than loving men and that was money: and they offered her a lot of it, if she could find out the secret of his strength and the way to overcome it.

—:6-14 Getting to work, Delilah, who was as straightforward in her speech as she was in her attire, told Samson she had never seen muscles like his and, my, my, would she like to know how he had got so strong and what it would take to subdue him (perish the thought). "Well," said Samson as if he were revealing a deep secret, "if I were tightly bound with seven fresh, undried bowstrings, I would probably become impotent, like an average man." Delilah obtained the material from the Philistines and, pretending it was some kind of game, tied him up with it. Several heavies were waiting and ready to jump him when she said, "Samson, the Philistines are going to get you!"—which had the effect of making him flex his muscles and break his bonds, forcing them to alter their plans for the day. Delilah

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[XVI:1-3]

Could not resist: Possibly the perfect judge would have been as good on private morality as on public safety, but who can say if such a man ever existed, and who is to blame Samson for having a good time when he could? Can we but imagine the strain he lived with? Still, it must be admitted that every time he went after these girls he got into trouble, so why couldn't he learn? There are some things a man can't learn or won't, that's being a man. You fight your way out of each piece of trouble you bring upon yourself until you find trouble too large for you and that's your life: that's life. Oy, *goyishe* romantics!

Smelling a rat: They were informed, not by the whore, but by her pimp. However, he became quite a linguist. The grand-concourse treatment is what they dreamed not what they did in the Bronx.

The doors: So that they would not see him as he vamoosed. Another interpretation: to terrify them by his strength, for Hebron is a long way from Gaza. A third: to make them afraid of demons, for how were they to know who moved the doors? Again: perhaps he took the doors to tell them they would never be safe behind them as long as he lived. Maybe he just didn't like doors. Or maybe the people of Hebron needed some extra doors.

[—:4-5]

There was something about them: And who is to say that it was not something that is in all women but that he dared not seek in his own? Perhaps, perhaps, still it was a mistake, alas. That he remembered in that way must mean his childhood had been happy.

Silk: Too warm, it must have been cotton. It says silk, doesn't it?

Brotherhood: Such ideas always circulate in times when things go well in Edom. So do they practice it?

Her kind of man: Of course she loved good men, for the good times they gave her, but she preferred money because it could give her pleasure without her having to give in return. Selfish love is not true. Samson too was selfish. No, for he gave himself completely when he let his head be turned.

Better than...men: Money was not as easy to find as powerful men, one of whom to her was as good as another.

The secret: It had at last occurred to the Philistines that perhaps Samson's strength was due to a special gift, yet it was not the gift they believed it to be, for it was not magic.

[—:6-14]

Straightforward: That is, she spoke what she thought because she was accustomed to getting what she wanted because she gave men unabashedly what they thought they wanted.

My, my: That husky, slightly whiny voice some women use to make men think their candid and well-calculated questions are mere childish curiosity. Do not think for a moment that he did not know what was going on; and yet there must have been a part of his soul that did not want to know.

Impotent: For he flirted with her.

Game: Delilah was good at games and perhaps she thought all of life was not more than a game.

Heavies: Gorillas, kept on a diet of bananas, but nasty.

"Going to get you": She said this to gloat, but also to cover herself, just in case. Women always do, just in case. There was no mayhem, because the men ran as soon as he broke the strings.

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puffed up her lips and placed her cheek on Samson's chest and said, "You are fooling around with me; come on, tell me how to tie you so that you will stay tied." "Well," said Samson, frowning, "brand new unused ropes surely would do the trick: tied with them, I would become impotent, like an average man." Continuing the little game, Delilah tied him with new ropes, got the men ready, and said, "Samson, the Philistines are going to get you!" and with a gesture of his arms, the ropes became like threads under a barber's razor. So she made a big scene with the tears and the rest and insisted she had a right to know, until Samson suggested, so he could have some quiet and take a nap, that weaving his hair and tightening it would make him impotent, like an average man. So she tried that and, would you know it, it did not work.

—:15-16 Now Delilah, who was up to her neck in this, threw in all she knew, crying and yelling and finally pulling the great female ace: "How can you treat me like this—it must be that you do not love me!" Alas, where women were concerned Samson was very very weak and many days of this kind of thing finally drove him up the wall.

—:17 Finally Samson could bear Delilah's nagging no longer and he erupted: "Don't you see what the matter is, don't you understand why my hair is so long unlike anyone else, uncut, don't you understand what it means to have all this hair and be a Nazirite, to have been made a Nazirite before the question was even asked of me, and have no say in the matter, no choice to do anything I might ever have wanted but only to serve with no visible compensation a God I've never seen and be built like some beach freak for the greater glory of a power nobody's ever spelled out to me, and don't you understand that without this hair I would be, I would be—"

—:18-20 This time Delilah knew she was not going to have to test Samson's confession, and she told the Philistines that they had their man and that they could pay her for the service rendered, which they did. Delilah gave Samson a lot to drink that night and he fell asleep upon her knees, and while he was there her manservant cut off all his hair and a great horrid sense of victory overcame her, and she began again to taunt him. "Samson," she said in the same voice she had said it before, "the Philistines are going to get you!"—and he did not know, as he jumped up and prepared to fight, until they had their hands upon him, that God was no longer with him, and that if he wanted to fight any more, he would have to do it alone.

Puffed up her lips: Delilah was not subtle, but neither was she stupid. She made an issue of the source of his strength and insisted upon it in such a way that the real issue—that it was none of her business and his duty was to preserve its secret so that he might perform his service to the Lord and to his people—was lost sight of. Since to Samson whether a woman had her way or not was irrelevant, eventually he always gave in. Unfortunately, giving in this time was of no small consequence.

A big scene: This is a condition of being male, and is no excuse for turning to the abomination of homosexuality. Tears on women are like Potemkin villages in Russia.

His hair: He had his hair on the brain; a bad sign. Not if it had been as frontlets before his eyes. To be sure, but that was Samson's problem, that he could not see the matter this way.

[—:15-16]

Up to her neck: She was: but we must admit it was he who had originally let her catch his eye.

All she knew: Perhaps the Philistine courtesans came and instructed her, when their lords grew impatient.

"Treat me like this": Her saying this proves that it was in fact she who did not love him.

Very very weak: Why did he not leave if her taunts tormented him? Because Samson after all these years still did not know for sure and this was a torture that confirmed his own suspicions about himself. But what did he not know for sure? What he was to do and whether he could do it and whether life was worth living. But Delilah? Of course: if not, would he have wasted time with her?

[—:17]

No longer: He lost his temper.

No say: But he did have a say: in the way he judged and lived. Yes, for everything is foreordained yet man is free.

Beach freak: Like a Californian.

I would be: He means he would be impotent, like an average man, as he says above. No, he means he would be free and know it. No, that is a mistaken interpretation: how could he be free without his great strength? He would, for he would no longer be a Nazirite, dedicated to the service of the Lord. No, for you are free only as you do what is expected of you. Understanding what is expected of you is understanding who you are. He could be free only by being himself better. What a paradoxical idea. It is time for the afternoon prayers.

[—: 18-20]

Delilah knew: For she had committed an evil deed, and like a good deed, it is known when it is done and not merely attempted; therefore, it is wrong to maintain that it is as evil to intend something bad as to do it.

A lot to drink: She gave him to drink, and more, because she wanted him to forget all that he had said for it had exhausted him but also excited him, and she had to make him rest so that she could betray him.

A great horrid sense: She sensed victory, for she did not love men and preferred them weak.

God was no longer with him: The Lord had left him: or he had left the Lord. But he did not immediately fully realize that he had done what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord. For it was not merely wanting to be not what he was, for this he had lived with a long time; it was doing—by telling her—that was an act hateful to the Creator, and He left him. "A man alone ain't got a bloody chance," said Hemingway. Who cares what Hemingway said?

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—:21-27 Having got him was not enough—the Philistines thought it was necessary to pull out his eyes, and, on the theory that prisoners ought to be a source of profit, they put him to work at the prison mill. His hair, meanwhile, began to grow again. For the Philistines, capturing Samson was such a big deal that they decided to have a big celebration, with a monstrous sacrifice to their idol, Dagon, for they thought they owed their victory to him. The sight of the pathetic judge, who had so powerfully made his existence felt during his years of guerrilla warfare, gave them a feeling of euphoria. They became happier and happier and, as the celebration progressed, they got the idea that nothing would be funnier than to put Samson on display in the middle of the whole show, so they pulled him out of prison and kicked him around. Samson put up with this meekly, and after some time he told the boy whose job it was to lead him by the hand to give him a break and let him rest for a while against the pillars which supported the amphitheater in which the festival was taking place. The theater was packed full, with all the notables in their box seats and there were about 3,000 more men and women on the roof straining to look at the captured hero as he ran about, stumbled, and tried to guard his face against the rocks and garbage that were thrown at him.

—:28-30 Resting on the thick columns, his powerful back and arms and legs bleeding and blue, Samson addressed God: "Now I know O Lord and now let me prove to You that I know and at the same time let me get some revenge on the Philistines." He grabbed the central pillars of the theater, one with the right hand and one with the left. "This is it!" he said to God, and he exerted himself as he never had before, more than the afternoon in Lehi, more than in all the twenty years of ambushes and escapades and outnumbered clashes, and the pillars cracked at the same moment as his aorta burst, and in the collapse of the great theater all the people who were there were killed—more, indeed, than in all the years of fighting.

—:31 His people came and found his broken body, still identifiable, and they buried him in the tomb of his father between Zorah and Eshtaol.

[—:21-27]

His eyes: They put out his eyes to cause him pain. Perhaps, but also because they were afraid of him.

Began to grow again: Why did they let his hair grow? They forgot. No, but they thought his blindness and the chains they put on him would be enough. Why did they not kill him? They thought his imprisonment was evidence of their victory over the Israelites. Also a bargaining chip in case of renewed hostilities. They deluded themselves in thinking that it was they or their false god who had given them a victory, when it was the Ineffable One who had accorded Samson a defeat.

Big celebration: Their sacrificial rituals included not only animals but also games to the death between men, impalings of slaves, and scandalous exhibitions of all sorts.

Meekly: Did Samson think he had done something to deserve this treatment? Perhaps, but that proves only that he was human. No, for he was awaiting his chance.

Packed: The full house shows the level of Philistine culture, for they loved nothing so much as to make an enemy suffer.

[—:28-30]

I know: He understood and accepted his mission for the Creator.

Some revenge: Only as he serves the Lord is some measure of personal revenge possible.

All the people: Was it just revenge that for him they should all be killed? This is war we are talking about.

Killed: This included Delilah.

[—:31]

Identifiable: They were able to find his body, for even in death his great strength had protected him.

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Literary Lives

Robert Alter

In memory of F. W. Dupee

We cannot know completely the intricacies with which any mind negotiates with its surroundings to produce literature. The controlled seething out of which great works come is not likely to yield all its secrets. Yet at moments, in glimpses, biographers seem to come close to it, and the effort to come close . . . is not frivolous.
—RICHARD ELLMANN, "Literary Biography"

THERE ONCE was a time when what passed for critical discourse could be confidently subsumed under two neatly coordinate rubrics, the Man and his Work. These were, as the French literary theorist, Gérard Genette, has tartly observed, "the two caryatids of the old style of literary studies." The *vie-et-oeuvre* school probably reached its apogee in the years preceding World War I, though many of its practitioners remained highly visible for the next few decades. After the Great War, there were the first fumbling attempts of the Marxists to explain the literary text through historical context, and of the Freudians to uncover pretext (in a double sense) in the text. These early efforts, at least in America, were followed by the emergence of the New Critics, who with their fine instruments of aesthetic analysis generally managed to sever the text from the particular human being who had produced it. And now, over the last decade and more, structuralism with equal effectiveness has displaced the writer from his work by its special emphasis on formal relations in literary texts, on genre, convention, allusion, and other modes of "intertextuality," and on the complex cultural codes that are inscribed—sometimes it seems hardly by an individual writer—in a literary text.

With all this, one might suppose that the practice of retelling a writer's life as a way to understand his work would be as obsolete as the 19th-century positivism which was largely responsible for its former vogue. But the fact of the matter is that the shelves of our bookstores are groaning under the weight of new literary biographies, which continue to appear at an unprecedented rate. During the past year or so, we have been offered—just to name some of the English and American writers treated—biographies of Samuel Johnson, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, Vladimir Nabokov, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Christopher Isherwood, Delmore Schwartz; and, beyond the Anglo-American sphere, a wide range of continental writers from Dostoevsky to Hesse to Cervantes have been the subject of new English biographies. Later this spring, New Republic Books will be publishing a collection of essays on the art of biography, and I suspect there will be more such books on biography as well as many more biographies in the near future.

At least some of the present impulse to write literary biography may be explained precisely as a reaction to the ascendancy of structuralism which I mentioned a moment ago. For the semiotic critic, the human writer tends to become an "emitter of messages" which are to be decoded by the reader; *écrivain* disappears before *écriture*, the act or process of producing written texts. Not only is that act or process the primary subject of critical discourse, but what generally emerges in this fashionable style of reading is that the "subject" of any given text is not some complex of experiences the writer may have undergone but rather the production and operation of the text itself. If Roland Barthes were to discuss Virginia Woolf's reshaping of the novel, he would no doubt talk about the historical tilt from one mode of semiosis to another, from the production of a so-called "readerly text" to a "writerly text"; and the prominence, say, of water imagery in her fiction might be taken as a comment on the fluid relation between signifier and signified dictated by a modern recognition of the arbitrary nature of linguistic conventions.

In this intellectual climate, an independent-minded critic could easily feel obliged, in the interests of psychological common sense, to ask, as Phyllis Rose does in her admirable study of Virginia Woolf,* some simple but compelling questions: might there be certain significant connections between the highly subjective lyric form

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* *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf*, Oxford, 298 pp., $12.95.

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Woolf created for the novel and her pained relations with her father, her sense of being disadvantaged as a girl growing up in an eminently Victorian household, her bouts of madness, her oddly deflected sexuality? Literature obviously could not exist without formal structures and shared codes that may have their own internal dynamics, but literary creation, after all, is a plant rooted in the rich soil of the individual writer's experience, and perhaps some critics, including younger ones, now feel impelled as a matter of intellectual self-defense to return in their work to that elemental truth.

It is also conceivable—and this would be a motive shared by readers and writers—that the current popularity of literary biography is in part attributable to the fact that we no longer live in a time of great writers. In regard to artistic originality, our age is manifestly a "postmodern era," as the academic journals by now have officially labeled it. When instead of Joyce and Mann and Proust and Faulkner, we have in our midst John Barth, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Günter Grass, and—at best—Saul Bellow, it is understandable and not necessarily reprehensible that both readers and critics should turn to the literary past with a certain degree of nostalgia. Occasionally, the 18th century, with its discipline of rational control and its striking manifestations of resolute will, has been attractive; more frequently, the 19th century, exhibiting such heroic artistic energies and, especially among novelists, such Promethean aspirations, has been the biographer's ideal territory. In recent years, however, it is the great age of modernism which reached its peak in the 20's that has tended to be the most fascinating object of biographical attention, which of course makes perfect sense in terms of our own cultural situation. The classic modern writers are figures for whom there exists a wealth of archival material to be exploited; they are figures who in most cases have not yet been adequately "done"; but, above all, they are the generation of giants in the earth to whom we, their pygmy progeny, can look up in envy and wonder.

The question, however, of why people read literary biographies is bound to have several answers. To begin with, on the lowest level, there is a certain obvious piquancy in gossip about the great, and in this respect literary biographies do not differ from biographies of (preferably self-destructive) movie stars, political leaders, or business tycoons. Our curiosity about the makers of our literature may tend toward the ferreting-out of sexual secrets—what did Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West really do on their nights together? Did Samuel Johnson and Mrs. Thrale engage in sado-masochistic rites? Was Stendhal impotent?—but it easly extends to physical debility, money matters, social relations, and psychological quirks that have no erotic manifestations. I suspect that the insatiable thirst for books about Bloomsbury during the last seven or eight years* is largely the result of the gossip side of readers' interest in literary biography. Bloomsbury, to be sure, was the closest approximation of a coherent center of modernism that London ever managed, but it has also become the intellectuals' *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Its setting in the second and third decades of our century holds more radical disruptions, more historical excitements, than the Edwardian background of the television series, but in its own way it, too, offers a glittering vision of style and elegance, a subtle play of class values we never knew in America, a peculiarly British combination of petulance and playfulness, made all the more appealing by the willful and at times exhibitionistic sexual rebelliousness of these genteel intellectuals, their self-conscious determination to be modern.

It is clear that any literary biography that attends chiefly to the aspects of its subject which are the province of gossip will have a trivializing effect. But there are two more elevated aims of literary biography to which almost any biographer who is not a hack will somehow address himself. A writer who has produced works of the imagination that will last presents a pattern of human greatness, however shambling or mediocre or grotesque his private life, however gnawing the anguish with which he had to live. Every great writer's life is in some way an exemplary life, which is why the interest in literary biography is more than the prurient reflex of cultivated gossip. Walter Jackson Bate, at the beginning of his life of Samuel Johnson,† states the edifying function of literary biography with unabashed directness: "The greatest writers, as Keats remarked about Shakespeare, lead 'a life of Allegory': their 'works are the comments on it.' But their lives become allegorical for us because the writers are so deeply akin to us." To this general proposition Bate adds a remark of Mrs. Thrale's on Johnson, the validity of which he will splendidly demonstrate in the next 600 pages: "His soul was not different than that of another person," simply "greater."

Such greatness can assert itself even in the throes of crushing defeat, as I believe is the case in the life of Kafka. But when a writer is really defeated, in his art and in his attempt to live a coherent life, some of our legitimate expectations as readers of literary biography are necessarily frustrated. Thus, James Atlas's meticulous and discreetly managed life of Delmore Schwartz,** tends to become increasingly oppressive after the first half-dozen chapters because of the subject, not the biographer. For if one is a literary person and not a clinician, what can one do with the life of a man of talent who produced his best work,

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* Still another is about to appear, a "group biography" by Leon Edel called *Bloomsbury, a House of Lions*.

†*Samuel Johnson*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 646 pp., $19.95.

***Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 418 pp., $15.00.

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much of it still only "promising," before he was twenty-eight, who then progressively destroyed everything he possessed—friendship, marriage, intellectual discipline—and finally became for long years a wretched hulk, sodden with drugs and alcohol, ravaged by the storms of psychosis? I don't mean to suggest that the lives of literary failures ought not to be written—we have, after all, as venerable an example in English as Samuel Johnson's life of the ne'er-do-well minor poet, Richard Savage—but these strike me as a rather limiting sub-genre of literary biography, given the deeper resonances to which we respond in the lives of those writers who achieve some ultimate triumph through their art.

The other source of abiding interest in literary biography is the fascination with the mystery of literary creation. Between an observed pattern in the life and the inward leap of creation there is a strong connection but also an unbridgeable gap. The pattern can be described and defined, the act of creation at best only intimated. The lives of writers, in contrast to other kinds of creative figures, offer a tantalizing promise of yielding their ultimate secret of achievement because the primary autobiographical documents and the work itself are in the same written language. We may pursue recurrent stylistic traits, syntactical structures, configurations of imagery, conscious themes, obsessional concerns, from the writer's journals and letters and memoirs to his novels or poems, but in the end that course will provide no more than a suggestive hypothesis about how the hiatus between life and art might have been crossed.

Having recently struggled with such problems in working on a biography of Stendhal, I would like to offer as an illustration one knotty instance of this general quandary with which I found myself confronted. In the fall of 1829, Stendhal, struck by a newspaper account of a young provincial tutor who was guillotined for shooting his former mistress, began rapidly sketching out the novel which, after several months of repeated interpolation and accretion, would become *The Red and the Black*. At that point, Stendhal had published only one novel, *Armance*, just two years earlier, at the age of forty-four, and that pale, often contrived performance would hardly be read today if it were not for what its author achieved afterward. The journalism, the travel books, the sundry works on art and music he had written between 1814 and 1829, reflect a shrewd, ironic intelligence, even exhibit moments of real brilliance, but they are not much more than attractive literary potpourris concocted by a highly gifted dilettante. Stendhal had aspired to literary greatness since childhood, but in the painfully abortive plays he attempted to write under the Empire as well as in his miscellaneous production during the Bourbon Restoration, he showed only the most intermittent evidence that he was capable of realizing that aspiration.

Then, in the last months of 1829 and in the early part of 1830, everything uncannily came together. The quavering voice of three decades suddenly reached perfect pitch. He was writing with a beautifully effective mobility of narrative point of view, a bold stylistic efficiency, a psychological penetration, a sense of the fine interplay among character, class, and the historical moment, and an ability to modulate from high comedy to tragedy, that had no direct models and certainly no equals in the European novel. One can of course point to various routes followed by Stendhal in his intellectual development, in his emotional history going back to childhood, in his political experience and in his romantic attachments, that lead to this moment, but the moment itself is finally inexplicable. In the end our efforts to assess the precise combination of ingredients will not really tell us how or why the mind reaches its moments of magic volatility. Perhaps this is why there is an aspect of inexhaustibility in the lives of great writers: they always remain to be retold because the essential fact of achievement can never be fully explained.

NEVERTHELESS, there is much that can be explained, and the current crop of literary biographies offers a spectrum of instructive instances of how to go about, and how not to go about, the process of explanation. The biographer may use any variety of analytic apparatuses in trying to understand the life of his subject, but I would suggest that he has to begin with a strong intuition of the human subject's distinctive presence, which must be patiently acquired from an intimate acquaintance with the writer's literary work, his journals, letters, marginalia, doodlings, and the available comments on him by his contemporaries. Without this intuition of presence, what results is a flat chronicle of events in the writer's life, not the complex effort of imaginative insight into a person that makes biography a serious genre.

A negative case in point is V.S. Pritchett's scandalously overpraised *The Gentle Barbarian: The Life and Work of Turgenev.** Since Pritchett knows no Russian, he cannot pretend to hear the subtle inflections of individuality one assumes Turgenev left in his public and private writing, and he cannot even inspect many of the documents that bear on Turgenev's life. In fact, he has fabricated his own narrative largely out of materials drawn from three earlier English biographies, by Avraham Yarmolinsky, David Magarschack, and (on the woman Turgenev loved) by April Fitzlyon. This highly mediated relation to his subject makes itself felt on almost every page. The "work" part, moreover, of the Life and Work, is a throwback to the worst of the late 19th-century tradition, being largely comprised of plot summaries punctuated by phrases of impressionistic approbation like "these figures are well-done" and "his ear is fine" (as though one could

* Random House, 243 pp., $10.00.

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infer anything about a writer's "ear" from translation).

Writing a biography, then, resembles novel-writing in its need for an immediate intuition of character and for an appropriate style and sense of narrative economy to render that intuition. In biography, of course, "character" is drawn from empirical data, and the biographer is not free to invent, say, undocumented details of dress, decor, and situation merely to make his story more vivid. But the plausible hypotheses about his subject through which he sees shape and order in the writer's life are halfway to being fictional constructs.

Precisely here lies the rub in the supposed objectivity of the biographical enterprise. Writing biography is never an innocent activity. No matter how voluminous the documentation that a biographer may have at his disposal, what he sees will be significantly determined by where he stands. The view of the subject in some instances is dictated by a specific ideology, so that we can have, say, a reading of Emily Brontë's life in feminist, Marxist, Freudian, or even Jungian terms, with only an approximate correspondence between any one version of Brontë and all the others. But even without an explicit ideology, anyone who tries to write biography is willy-nilly drawn to his particular subject by certain features which, whether he realizes it or not, are in tune with aspects of his own sensibility, perhaps with his own fantasy life, with his moral, aesthetic, or political commitments. What will emerge as foreground and background in a life, how different facts are to be connected, what will be the order of presentation of certain details, what lines of causal explanation will be proposed—all this depends on the biographer's shaping point of view.

Still, if the subject of the biography is not to be entirely inert, the biographer, once his own viewpoint is determined, must exercise some of the capacity of the novelist for imaginative identification. Here, for example, is how Phyllis Rose begins her life of Virginia Woolf: "Her earliest memory was of red and purple flowers on a black dress. She was sitting on her mother's lap, returning from St. Ives, in Cornwall. Then, the sound of waves breaking on the beach as she lay in the nursery." With almost deceptive simplicity, Mrs. Rose starts by drawing us into Virginia Woolf's inner world. Each of these details of perception from Woolf's childhood is clearly documented, but, however unobtrusively, the concrete details also immediately establish a perspective on the life and the work. The images of waves and flowers will dominate *Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves*; the need for maternal protection will be a recurrent theme of Woolf's life (for at least in a biography, a life has themes); and her ambivalence toward her mother, whom she was to lose so early, will have enormous consequences in her emotional development, her fiction, her feminism.

These first sentences of *Woman of Letters* illustrate what seems to me another basic principle of literary biography: that there can be no disjunction between writing about the life and writing about the work. Since it is the work, after all, that draws us to the life of the writer, every small stroke in recounting the life should ideally contribute, however obliquely, to enlarging our sense of how the cumulative experience of the writer issued in the work. A writer's work is so fundamental to the way he is in the world that an account of his life which does not somehow incorporate a critical consideration of his work is bound to produce a foreshortened vision of the writer.

Paul Delany, for example, affirms at the beginning of his book on D. H. Lawrence during the war years,* that he has chosen to stick for the most part to the perspective of literary biography rather than that of critical interpretation. With this self-limitation, he has written a very good book on a subject that might have elicited an altogether remarkable one. His narrative is based on scrupulous research; he writes with literate clarity; and he assesses Lawrence and his tangled relationships during these years with unflagging judiciousness. Delany's occasional interpretative remarks are finely suggestive—like his proposal of a connection between the oscillations in Lawrence's thinking and the physiological swings of his tubercular condition, or his comment on the way Lawrence, even as he vehemently opposed the war, absorbed the imagery and violence of the war atmosphere into his own imaginative idiom. But *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are treated mainly as sources of autobiographical data, and that has, I think, an especially foreshortening effect for a writer like Lawrence. He was in many ways a disagreeable man—ill-tempered, egotistical, childish, grandiose, often filled with loathing (misanthropy is too pale a word) for mankind. But the "exemplary" aspect of this desperately unhappy, snarling figure was that he created *Women in Love* and a few of the finest short stories in modern English: it was in his best writing that he found health in his sickness, triumph in his long, rasping defeat. Paul Delany is of course quite aware of all that, but his narrative is not pitched toward the achievement, and as a result his book, though intelligently conceived and skillfully written, lacks a compelling imaginative center.

To be sure, one can easily sin more egregiously in the opposite direction, as Frederick R. Karl does on a titanic scale in his biography of Conrad.† In dealing with Conrad's

* *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War*, Basic Books, 420 pp., $15.95.

† *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1008 pp., $25.00.

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Polish boyhood and his seventeen years as a sailor, Karl is very keen on defining the various configurations in the life that will determine the distinctive nature of the fiction. He has inquired into every nook and cranny of his subject's personal history, early and late, with a thoroughness that surpasses all previous biographers of Conrad, but the consequence of the interpretative strategy he has adopted is curiously self-defeating. For much of the first few hundred pages of this enormous book, the narrative surface is marred by a constantly spreading rash of prolepsis. Karl scarcely allows himself to report a single significant incident, from childhood illness to an early attempt at suicide, without elaborating in detail the pattern he supposes it to prefigure, sometimes even embarking on lengthy discussions of the novels in which Conrad later may have artistically worked out the early experience. Alongside these long anticipatory passages, one finds an abundance of water-treading maneuvers like the following: "He was registering, recording, storing memories, and learning to deal with experience, even at this age. He was, apparently, a recording machine of sorts; the brain working was inchoate, uncertain, lacking direction, but it was the brain of the future storyteller and novelist." The unfortunate result is that the younger Conrad too often disappears behind the scrim of the biographer's rather self-conscious interpretations and directional indications.

Once Conrad embarks on his literary career, he is converted from a recording machine into a writing machine, and between the two, the man who wrote *Nostromo* and *Lord Jim* never seems entirely real. Many writers get caught up obsessively in the relentless rhythm of their vocation, but Karl's account of the mature Conrad places such unrelieved emphasis on the minute circumstances of the novelist at his desk, the number of words produced per diem for each book, the number of pounds sterling advanced him per quarter by his agent, his maneuvers among publishers and collectors, that his relations with his wife, his sons, even his literary friends, fade into an abstraction, dutifully dealt with but never quite realized by the biographer. This overfocused circumstantiality, coupled with an awkward, frequently faulty style, creates a serious problem of readability. Karl has gone through some 1,500 letters and various other documents to which previous scholars have not had access, and perhaps one must view his week-by-week chronicle of the gestation of Conrad's books as a useful compendium of reference materials for others doing research on Conrad. It is harder to see it as biographical narrative with sufficient momentum to carry forward a literate general reader.

Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives also raises the vexed question of length in literary biographies. The tendency to gigantism among American biographers has, quite justifiably, elicited frequent denunciations of the so-called laundry-list or daily-menu approach to biography, an approach based on the fallacious assumption that since a life is made up of endless details, the more details you put in your book, the more of the life you will capture. There is, however, no ideal size for biography, and length sometimes can be amply warranted. Walter Jackson Bate uses some 250,000 words for his life of Johnson, but his thorough account of Johnson's personal history, accompanied by analytic attention to all the major works, reflects a fine sense of revelatory detail, never wanders into trivia, and our interest is steadily engaged because whatever he deals with is powerfully informed by a central imagination of Johnson's distinctive presence, his unfolding character. In quite another direction, it seems clear from the first volume of Joseph Frank's projected four-volume biography of Dostoevsky that the scale of that work will justify itself because in order to set Dostoevsky in proper perspective, the biographer has undertaken a vast, and illuminating, reconstruction of the 19th-century Russian setting out of which the novelist developed.

Now, Karl is by no means a practitioner of the laundry-list school of biography, but the bulkiness of his book—almost half-a-million words—points to other varieties of laxity into which American biographers are too easily tempted. There seems to be a widespread sense that if you somehow *surround* the life, say everything about it you can think of saying, you will encompass it; and this tendency is lamentably encouraged by the disposition of many reviewers—as has been the case with Karl's book—to be imposed upon by sheer volume, which is immediately celebrated as "monumental," "definitive," "classic" biography. There is some scrupulous and informative consideration of Conrad's professional life in Karl's study, but it is buried in layer upon layer of adipose tissue. This includes, aside from the lavish deployment of interpretative anticipation and the excessive circumstantiality, sheer repetition (there is scarcely an important aspect of the Conrad story that is not run past us five or six times); gratuitously copious quotation of sources; and, above all, a tireless invocation of supposed parallels to the writer and of what are imagined as authoritative models for interpreting a life. The proposed analogies between Conrad and Mallarmé (whom Karl would appear to know mainly from Wallace Fowlie's distillations), Conrad and Proust, Conrad and Kafka, all seem rather dubious and unhelpful, though in varying degrees. How silly this game of comparisons can become is evident when the biographer begins to write sentences like the following: "Seen through a different lens, and if written in French [*sic*], *Nostromo* becomes Conrad's 'Proustian novel,' the depiction of a society analyzed and atomized [anatomized?]. If Conrad had become a French writer, as he once contemplated, he might have begun like Flaubert

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and Maupassant, and developed toward Gide or Proust." Elsewhere, in an effort to explain Conrad, Karl quotes or summarizes at length from Jung, Freud, Erik Erikson, Erich Neumann, Ernst Kris, Mircea Eliade, Herbert Marcuse, and other guides to psyche and self, giving the impression of a series of cumbersome grids imposed on his subject rather than a clear vision of the man.

This last point leads me to a final general issue in the writing of biography, which is the extent to which anyone not technically trained and not intending a specially focused "psychobiography" can bring to bear established paradigms of psychological explanation. Here the biographer finds himself in something of a dilemma. He can scarcely pretend that psychoanalysis doesn't exist, that there is no unconscious, that memory and behavior are not marked by elaborate defense-mechanisms, screen-devices, and other oblique manifestations of things repressed. Yet a literary biographer is not likely to have any professional command of the ramified and evolving body of psychoanalytic discourse, and even if he did, because he is working after all with the leavings of a life on paper, not with a living patient on a couch, whatever he has to say about the "depth psychology" of his subject is bound to be rather conjectural. The most sensible course, I suppose, is some sort of tactful compromise. When one encounters, for example, a testimony like the famous passage in Stendhal's autobiography in which the novelist recalls how as a small child he loved to embrace his mother, how he longed to be naked with her, and how he hated his father's interference, one can hardly put aside the specific cultural awareness we all share since Freud of Oedipal desire and its importance both in early development and as a matrix for later attachments. But it seems to me unwise, not only as a matter of rhetorical tact but also as a matter of conceptual precision, to hammer down the meaning of an experience so suggestively evoked by the writer with the rigid nails of a ready-made technical terminology.

A biographer probably has to find some discreet means to alert his reader to psychological dimensions of the subject about which the reader will be able to draw the necessary inferences or make the appropriate conjectures, but as a rule the biographer will be able genuinely to reveal more of the writer's nature not by presuming to inquire into the unconscious but by observing precisely how the writer casts such early memories in language, how they feed into the imagery and personages and imaginative texture of his conscious art. No one has argued ths position more persuasively than Richard Ellmann in his essay on literary biography: "As we push back into the mind of a writer, we are apt to lose sight of his conscious direction, of all that gives shape to what might otherwise be his run-of-the-mill phobias or obsessions and distinguishes his grand paranoia from our own squirmy one. . . . We may reduce all achievement to a web of causation until we cannot see the Ego for the Id." Causation, of course, cannot be neglected in giving a coherent account of a life, but I would argue that the primary task of the literary biographer is the elucidation of design, not the tracing of etiology.

In precisely this regard, I would take issue with an underlying assumption about literary biography suggested by Leon Edel in a recent essay, "The Figure Under the Carpet" (the *New Republic*, February 10, 1979). In pointedly deforming the emblematic Jamesian phrase, the figure in the carpet, Edel proposes that it is the business of the biographer to look at the hidden underside of the writer's life, for "beyond the flesh and the legend there is an inner sense of self, an inner man or woman, who shapes and expresses, alters and clothes the personality that is our subject and our art." The truth of the assertion must be conceded since one hardly wants to claim that the outward person is generally a transparent revelation of the inward self, but I am troubled by the implications of the argument. For the literary biographer as Edel sees him is a kind of intellectual detective, constantly sorting out unconscious or at least devious motive from visible expression, exercising compassion, to be sure, toward his subject, but finally enjoying a godlike superiority in often being able to know more about the secret springs of the writer's life than the writer himself.

Underlying this view is an assumption of the biographer's lofty objectivity that does not take into account the relativity of his viewpoint, his own lack of innocence vis-à-vis his subject. The brief examples Edel offers of figures under the carpet in the lives of Hemingway, Thoreau, and Rex Stout are not reassuring: in the case of Hemingway, the analysis is almost too obvious to be worth the trouble (the insecurity behind the constant show of virility); for Thoreau and Stout, the procedure seems more clever than biographically interesting. But the essential difficulty is that while the lives of some writers may lend themselves to this reversing of the carpet, in many other cases the operation will actually throw things out of proportion, lose the significant pattern, which was there all along to be followed by the patient eye and illumined by resourceful interpretation.

I would suggest that though psychological theory may alert the biographer to aspects of experience that require special scrutiny, his best understandings will be improvised *ad hoc* after close observation of the particular case, substantially the way most of us try to make judgments about people in the shifting contexts of social intercourse. Judgments of this sort will always be influenced by one's point of view, but much depends on how rigidly or flexibly one maintains it. Thus, Phyllis Rose's avowedly feminist perspective on Virginia Woolf is applied reasonably, almost always without tendentious insistence, and it is of course a

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perspective that accords with a conscious commitment of the novelist's and with her own perception of her formative years. Virtually the only place where this study of Virginia Woolf begins to flag is when for a few pages the biographer stoops to lean on R. D. Laing, whose guidance may have led her to speak loosely—and to my mind, untenably—of Woolf's madness as a "unique adventure," a "discipline," an "education." In general, though, Mrs. Rose's direct perceptions of Woolf, including of Woolf's human and artistic limitations, are much subtler and eminently more sensible than this.

IN ANY case, the most interesting aspect of literary biography is not the discovery of the devious but the full imaginative recovery of the obvious. Bate's memorable study of Johnson is an instructive case in point. Bate occasionally, and perhaps a little stiffly, invokes Freud's notion of the superego—if ever a man suffered from a hypertrophied superego, to the very brink of madness, it was Johnson—but by and large he explains his subject with an old-fashioned moral psychology that admirably accords with his Keatsian conception of a "life of Allegory." As different as his sensibility and the tonalities of his prose are from Phyllis Rose's, one feels here, too, that the real strength of understanding of the writer flows not from a general theory of the self—though it may at times draw on such a theory—but from a direct scrutiny of every testimony left by his subject coupled with the biographer's own sense of what life is all about. Here is one of his early characterizations of Johnson, on which he will build much that follows:

> One of the most striking things about Johnson's whole psychic nature is the severe rein he kept on any temptation (and it could naturally be very strong) to project outward and to blame external conditions. Instead his whole procedure . . . was to meet a thing head on, as courageously and honestly as he could, and then internalize and contain it. The result—whatever the moral advantage—was time and again a pattern of self-conflict rather than of projection. Often, as we shall see, there is in this a strong element of compensation, a forceful bending over backward.

Two of the terms used here, projection and internalization, have a psychological provenance, but the analysis is not in any rigorous sense psychoanalytic, and, conceptually, it would have been perfectly comprehensible to Johnson and his contemporaries. In regard, moreover, to what I noted earlier about the biographer's necessary intuition of presence, the passage embodies what amounts to a kinesthetic image of the man, with Johnson vividly conceived as an almost dangerously vigorous flexer of psychic musculature. Later, when Bate discusses Johnson's "aggressive independence" as a thinker, the image of the man who meets things head on is effectively reasserted. Bate writes of Johnson's "refusal to be intimidated by the 'authority' of fashion; his scorn of the 'cant' of those who are conditioned by attitudes simply because they are current; his tendency to walk immediately up to the tyranny of the stock response in the prevailing mode of thinking, and to push directly through it in order to see what is on the other side." This is something we have always approximately known about Johnson, but not with this strong sense of connection between the exploder of intellectual fads and the troubled, terrifically resolute inner man. One might perhaps object that the entire picture of a bravely independent Johnson is a reflection of Bate's own particular brand of moralism, but this strikes me as a signal instance in which there is a nice fit between the sensibility of the biographer and the nature of his subject. And as Bate steadily interweaves criticism with biographical narrative, his construction of Johnson's lifelong intransigence toward himself helps us see more clearly the peculiar strength of Johnson's moral vision, even the distinctive vigor he exercised as a stylist.

As readers we may be grateful that there is no single assured model of biographical criticism: the endlessly intricate arabesques in which life and art intersect would seem to preclude that possibility. The best literary biographies, I think, do not concentrate on the pedantic and finally simplistic operation of uncovering the "real-life models" of the writer's imaginative creations, though that operation may have a certain utility in cases where the writing can be used as documentation of events in the life. Biographers like Bate, Phyllis Rose, and Joseph Frank are quite aware of the futility in attempting to *derive* the work from the life, but their informed pondering of the movement from multifarious experience to accomplished art heightens our understanding of both subjects.

Through the realized presence of the individual writer which a gifted biographer is able to conjure up, we are put in touch with a particular kind of human greatness, ultimately enheartening as all greatness must be. In the examination of the whole system of mind and memory and feeling through which experience becomes art, we may arrive at a perception of literary art and the human needs to which it answers that is beyond the purview of formalist criticism. Biographical portraiture and, even more, biographical criticism, may be doomed to give us no more than brilliant approximations, always bound to a particular viewpoint, but, as the better recent practitioners of the art demonstrate, the effort is far from frivolous.

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How Rumkowski Died

Michael Checinski

Lodz was the first and the last Jewish ghetto in Nazi Europe. Established in April 1940, six months earlier than the Warsaw ghetto, it endured four years and four months, until its final liquidation in July-August 1944. Although it had a population half the size of the Warsaw ghetto, the Lodz ghetto was famous for having the most dictatorial Jewish Council, the most notorious Elder, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, and an especially hated Chief of Police, Leon Rosenblatt.

Rumkowski and Rosenblatt were included in the last transport of Jews to leave the Lodz ghetto for the death camp at Auschwitz in August 1944. The manner of their end there has been the subject of various and conflicting reports, virtually all of them based on hearsay, in the years since the end of World War II. We present here a new account by one who was on the same deportation from Lodz as the ghetto elite, and who believes himself to be the sole surviving witness of their deaths.

Michael Checinski, one of the leaders of the resistance movement in the Lodz ghetto, escaped from Auschwitz during a forced march in January 1945. Mr. Checinski left Poland in 1969 and emigrated to Israel. An economist by training, he is also the author of a book-length study of anti-Semitism in postwar Poland. He is presently an associate of the Russian Research Center at Harvard. This memoir of the deaths of Rumkowski and Rosenblatt, which forms a part of his autobiography-in-progress, has been edited for publication by Susan Jo Gardos.

On August 30, 1944, I left Ghetto Lodz together with my whole family. They had somehow succeeded in surviving the most horrible times in the ghetto: my father, my mother, my older brother, and my younger sister. By this time there was only a handful of Jews left in the ghetto. We were sure that we were the last to leave. This conviction was confirmed when we saw, waiting on the same platform, Rumkowski, Rosenblatt, and all the other *Judenrat* elite. We were gathered at the railroad station outside the city, the one used for freight, not the station in the center of town, which was for passengers. Nevertheless, the mere presence of these "invincibles" gave us courage, a little hope that maybe the situation wasn't as bad as we suspected in our hearts.

Much has been written about Chaim Rumkowski, most notably Adolf Rudnicki's study, *Kupiec Lodzki* ("The Lodz Merchant," Warsaw, 1963). Rosenblatt has received less attention. He was a Germanized Polish Jew who, along with all the other Jews without German citizenship, was evicted from the Reich in 1938. In Ghetto Lodz he became Chief of Police, not just of the ordinary police, whose function was merely to maintain law and order, but of the most horrible group of police, the *Sonderabteilung*, who cooperated with the Germans in the evacuation of the Jews from the ghetto to the camps. One story will suffice to indicate the extent of the hatred that existed in the ghetto toward Rosenblatt.

Some criminals from the Jewish underworld, which was very well established in Lodz even before the war, joined the ghetto Jewish police force. They were needed for their strength, ruthlessness, and lack of moral scruples. Not all criminals chose to collaborate, however. One such was Moishe Hussid. A tough, heavy-set, gorilla-like man, Moishe had once been a *Yeshivah bocher*, hence his sobriquet "Hussid." After leaving the yeshivah, for whatever reason, he went on to become one of the most celebrated figures in the Jewish underworld of thieves and criminals. One day early in 1943, the German *Kripo* (criminal police) visited Ghetto Lodz, as they did every week, confiscating any gold, silver, diamonds, or money which their network of informers led them to, and incidentally beating and even killing the unfortunate "hoarders" along the way. This particular day, they collected a whole suitcase of valuables, locked it in their car, and left it for a short time. When they returned, the suitcase was gone! The *Kripo* gave Rumkowski and Rosenblatt exactly twenty-four hours to find the suitcase and the thief. If the piece of luggage was not found, one hundred Jews would be publicly hanged. Special wall posters were quickly plastered all over the ghetto, imploring the burglar to come forward and save the lives of one hundred Jews. Unbelievably, he came. It was Moishe Hussid.

Moishe Hussid was brought before Rosenblatt, and as the story (which spread like wildfire through the ghetto) is told, said to him, "I am a Jew with a Jewish heart. Jewish lives are worth more to me than gold and silver. You, you send thousands of Jews every month to Chelmno to die in gas chambers, and you do this to save your own skin. To me, the lives of one hundred Jews are more important than my own life." Naturally, he was arrested and deported.

And now, on August 30, 1944, this all-powerful Rosenblatt stood on the platform with the rest of us, waiting to enter the cattle cars, just like the many thousands he had sent before him. Our journey to Auschwitz, which normally should have taken six or seven hours, took about fifteen hours. Our train was stopped many, many times, in order to let "more important" traffic pass. We left in the evening and arrived in the late morning of the next day. As soon as we arrived at our destination, the doors were opened and

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everyone was immediately divided into two groups, men and women. Then came the selection: to the right and to the left.

It is almost impossible for anyone who was not there to appreciate the depth and persistence of our ignorance. In retrospect it is clear where we were being taken, what *"Arbeit Macht Frei"* stood for, what it meant to go to the left or to the right. The reader will probably be incredulous when I insist that even I, a sophisticated resistance leader, did not understand where I was and what was happening around me. We all knew in a vague way that there were death camps, but where we stood in the process at any given moment, we had no idea. I was clutching my father so tightly that I did not even see which way the SS man was directing me with his baton. I wanted very badly to stay with my father, but at the last second, I don't know why, I went to the left, where my brother had gone, and not with my father to the right. I never saw my parents again.

Those of us on the left were ordered to march five abreast, flanked by a double column of German guards with dogs. Suddenly we saw a most amazing sight. There, to our left, was a special platform, a reviewing stand, like a small amphitheater, with three or four steps leading up to the dais. In the center sat Rumkowski, surrounded by Rosenblatt and their entourage, looking for all the world like heads of state reviewing their troops, while we, their "troops," marched past, a most bedraggled military parade. Thus did the Germans cynically keep up the charade of *Judenrat* power until the bitter end.

We were marched to a place in Auschwitz called "Canada." Canada, even more than the United States, had been the symbol in Eastern Europe for a land flowing with milk and honey, and indeed, those prisoners who lived in "Canada" led a very good life. They were the primary helpers of the Germans. They served in the disinfection process, in the gas chambers, removing the bodies, and so forth. Every half year or so, they were themselves killed and replaced by others. The Germans wanted no witnesses. But while they lived there, they lived "well," if one can use such a term under the circumstances. At least they never went hungry. A few of them, possibly because they had proved their worth to the Germans, managed to establish very strong positions for themselves within "Canada" and survived the periodic turnovers. Such a one was Moishe Hussid.

No sooner did we arrive in "Canada," than our hero from Ghetto Lodz appeared. For the first time we realized that the Germans had not killed him after the "suitcase" affair. Prisoners weren't allowed to speak, but a ripple went through the crowd, whispering his identity to those who didn't recognize him. The first words he growled were, "Where is Rosenblatt?" To my surprise, Rosenblatt was standing a few rows behind me, to my left. *Sic transit gloria.* The massive bear-like Moishe Hussid gently took hold of Rosenblatt by the wrist and delicately, like a cat relishing its captured mouse, led him to the front row. In a voice dripping with mock politeness, Moishe Hussid cooed in Yiddish so that all could hear:

"Aaah, Rosenblatt, finally you are here. I have been waiting for you a long, long time. I was *sure* that you would come. I was determined not to die until I saw you again. Now I have a proposal for you."

Here, he stooped down and picked up a shaving razor from the ground. Handing it to Rosenblatt, he continued:

"You are such an important Jew. You are such a hero. You had so much courage when it came to killing thousands and thousands of Jews. Now, please, have the courage to kill yourself."

Rosenblatt took the razor and stared at it, frozen, in a state of shock.

"I am doing you a big favor, Rosenblatt, by giving you this chance to kill yourself. Because if you don't do it, I will do it for you; but I warn you, it will be a horrible, horrible death."

Rosenblatt could not make a move.

Then Moishe Hussid started in on him. He began by making him jump up and down, froglike, with knees bent and arms outstretched, I don't know how many times. This was followed by some relatively mild tortures, clearly the hors d'oeuvres. Meanwhile, the rest of us were herded inside a huge barrack for disinfection. Our heads, our armpits, our pubic hair, were all crudely shaven and into our painfully raw skin was rubbed benzol, a harshly irritating fluid. All our clothing was taken away. We were left standing naked, except for our belts, which we were allowed to keep. I happened to have a special belt, the kind without holes that closes automatically. At that moment, Moishe Hussid came into the barracks, dragging the by now bloody and beaten Rosenblatt. Moishe Hussid had the look of a half-crazed animal. He was in a virtual ecstasy of violence. He looked wildly around for a belt. His eyes lit on me—he took my belt! (For a long time after I had no belt—in Auschwitz, no easy thing.) He made a noose of my belt around Rosenblatt's neck and swung him around and around, until his eyes bulged and he was blue in the face. He stopped at the brink of death, threw cold water on him to revive him, saying, "No, no, you cannot die yet," and proceeded to put his barely conscious victim into a steaming hot shower. Rosenblatt's screams were horrible. When he was taken out, he looked like a scalded chicken, his skin red and broken. He was unconscious but somehow still alive. Moishe Hussid began to jump and dance on him, breaking his bones with his heavy wooden shoes. Finally, a German in civilian clothes entered, tapped Moishe in a comradely way on the shoulder, and calmly said, "Moishe, *genug.* Enough. Finish with him."

There were two places in Auschwitz where the Germans disposed of Jewish bodies. One was the crematorium. The other was a huge open pit in which a fire permanently blazed twenty-four hours a day. Into this pit were thrown "surplus" Jews, for whom there was no room in the gas chambers when the daily transport was too large. (Toward the end, eight such huge pits were dug.) They also threw children, old people, and invalids, from whom they feared no resistance, into the pit. This also saved on expensive gas. The pit was about thirty or

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forty meters from the barracks where we were disinfected. When, that night, they took us to see the pit, in order to break our spirit, its fiery flames against the sky made me absolutely sure I was in Hell. Not in a place that metaphorically resembled Hell, but really in Hell itself. And it was into this pit that Moishe Hussid threw the unconscious Rosenblatt.

Earlier, during the torture of Rosenblatt in the hot shower, there was an interruption, and Moishe Hussid was seen carrying an old man with a shock of white hair, also unconscious, on his back. It was Rumkowski! Moishe Hussid took him out the same door which led to the pit. When he came back, he said to us with great satisfaction, "Now I have finished with the two of them." Describing with a mixture of glee and contempt the last minutes of the former "dictator," Moishe Hussid added that Rumkowski had been so terrified that he was "*bekakt un hot geshtinken.*" In other words, fear had made him lose control of his bowels. "*Der Alter,* the Elder—he stunk something awful."

AFTER the war, I sent my testimony to the Institute of Jewish History in Warsaw and to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. However, I never could find out what happened to Moishe Hussid. Twenty years passed and I emigrated to Israel. Nine more years passed. One night I happened to be on neighborhood patrol duty. My partner was my downstairs neighbor, also a Jew from Ghetto Lodz, who had relatives in Munich. To pass the time I started telling the story about Rumkowski. As soon as I mentioned the name Moishe Hussid, he interrupted me excitedly, "What? Moishe Hussid? I know him! I talked with him two years ago in Munich!"

"He is in Munich? I am ready to fly there immediately!"

"You are too late. He died eight months ago."

Discreet inquiries to his widow in Munich revealed that not even she knew anything about Rumkowski and Rosenblatt. So Moishe Hussid died without telling a single soul about how he killed Rumkowski and Rosenblatt in Auschwitz.

World War II—Soviet Style

Joshua Rubenstein

THIS past year, a unique series of documentary films on World War II appeared on television stations in twelve major American cities. Entitled *The Unknown War,* the series is based almost entirely on footage assembled by Soviet armed-forces photographers on the Eastern front, with a good deal of film captured from the Germans themselves. Much of the material has never been shown before in the United States. While many Americans remember the major battles of World War II that took place in France or in the Pacific or in North Africa, the battles between Soviet and German tanks and infantry on the Eastern front remain vague in memory, their decisive character forgotten altogether. For this reason alone *The Unknown War* would seem to be a worthwhile project.

On June 22, 1941, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union with the most massive military force ever assembled: over four million men, 3,500 tanks, 3,900 planes, and 50,000 pieces of artillery. The Red Army virtually collapsed. Within six months, about four million Soviet soldiers were captured and three million were killed. Most of the Ukraine, including Kiev, was occupied, Leningrad was besieged, and Moscow itself was threatened. In November, barely five months after the invasion, Soviet troops paraded through Red Square on the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution and then marched to the front; the Germans were near the suburbs.

Parts of the Ukraine and Byelorussia were occupied for three years, during which time the Germans shot over one million Jews. Leningrad remained under siege for 900 days. Almost half of the city's population, well over a million people, perished, mostly from hunger. There were incidents of cannibalism.

The German advance was not halted until it reached Stalingrad, on the banks of the Volga. Artillery and aerial bombardment destroyed the city, but the Red Army defended it block by block. Opposing infantry occupied different floors of apartment houses. Still, the Germans did not cross the Volga. From there, beginning in 1943, the Red Army pushed the Germans west, liberating the Ukraine and Byelorussia, the Baltic states, and then driving through Eastern Europe until the Red flag itself was unfurled above a gutted Reichstag in Berlin.

The twenty episodes of *The Unknown War* portray and document this terrible conflict, in which the the Russians lost at least 20 million people, over 1,700 towns and cities, and with them 32,000 factories and 70,000 villages. The series, narrated by Burt Lancaster and edited by Isaac Kleinerman (the film editor for *Victory at Sea*), makes use of some extraordinary footage—corpses being dragged on sleds to the cemetery in Leningrad, pictures taken by the

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Germans of Jews stripping and falling into the ravine at Babi Yar —to create an often devastating visual effect.

Unfortunately, this effect is achieved at the price of historical distortion and falsification. Although produced at the initiative of an American company called Air Time International, *The Unknown War* accepts the official Soviet interpretation of the events it portrays—in particular the idea that the struggle against the Germans was a common effort on the part of the Russian people and their government, and that sole blame for the dimension of the Soviet losses is to be laid on the fascists. In line with this, the script avoids mentioning events which Soviet authorities prefer to ignore; and where it does cover issues of controversy, it invariably adopts a point of view that coincides with official Soviet historiography.

Thus, in the first episode of *The Unknown War*, the situation in the Soviet Union immediately before the war is described in idyllic terms. Under Stalin's leadership, "factories were given priority over creature comforts" but "workers learned as they labored." We are informed that "in the 1930's the quality of life was improving in the Soviet Union," as images of factory workers, farm laborers, and bustling urban crowds flash across the screen. The episode goes on to relate how Stalin tried to gain time to prepare for war by signing a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939, but Hitler surprised him anyway two years later. In describing the initial, disastrous Soviet setbacks, the script does recall that Stalin ignored intelligence reports and that the country was caught by surprise, totally unprepared for the German invasion. But there is no mention of the actual situation in the country or of the magnitude of Stalin's responsibility for the disaster.

THE Soviet Union of the 1930's endured one of the great terrors in history. During the forced collectivization of agriculture—referred to offhandedly by the television script—a million Ukrainian peasants were allowed to starve to death, while other peasants, the so-called *kulaks* who had a bit more land and livestock than their neighbors, were executed. In a version of *The Unknown War* done in book form, Harrison Salisbury recalls Stalin's admission to Churchill that the crisis over collectivization was greater than the strain imposed by the German invasion.* No such admission occurs in the television series.

During the Great Purge of 1936-37, when millions of party members and ordinary people were killed, Stalin destroyed virtually the entire high command of the Red Army, including all division and brigade commanders. He created a mood of profound insecurity in the armed forces and in industry. No one wanted to make a decision or take the initiative for any project, lest he be accused of "sabotage." The purge is not mentioned in *The Unknown War*.

The Soviet-German treaties of 1939 also contributed to Russia's collapse. *The Unknown War* gives no hint of the secret memoranda that accompanied the two treaties or of Soviet complicity with the Nazis until Hitler's betrayal in June 1941. The film shows scenes of Ribbentrop and Molotov signing the non-aggression pact in August 1939, with Stalin hovering over their shoulders. But the archives must also contain scenes of the banquet at which Stalin offered a toast to the health of Himmler, and Ribbentrop responded with a toast to Beria. This morsel of history has been excluded.

Stalin's diplomacy was a gross and immoral miscalculation. By dividing Poland with Germany and incorporating the Baltic states, Stalin created a mutual border with Germany that had never before existed. He knew that the treaties would allow Hitler to invade Poland, starting a general European war. But he hoped to stay out of it, while England and especially France kept the Nazis busy. The French collapse in June 1940 doomed Stalin's plans.

Still, he tried to bribe Hitler. The Soviet Union agreed to exchange information with the Nazis about Polish resistance units. Stalin gave the Nazis a naval base near Murmansk, on Soviet territory, where German ships could refuel and be repaired. Soviet ships reported weather conditions to the Luftwaffe while the Nazis were bombarding England. Stalin also gave Germany the right to transport strategic raw materials from Japan over the Trans-Siberian railway. None of this is acknowledged by the series.

As Solzhenitsyn remarks in *The First Circle*, all his life Stalin trusted only one man—Hitler—and that one let him down. As a result of that trust, the German invasion of Russia succeeded brilliantly. Five-and-a-half million Soviet troops were taken prisoner in the course of the war. The television series makes pious remarks about their plight while ignoring the fact that they were betrayed by their own government. In October 1941, when Molotov protested their treatment at the hands of the Germans, Hitler responded by reminding the world that the Soviet regime did not adhere to the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war. The Swedish Red Cross offered to serve as a mediator between the prisoners and the USSR, but by then Stalin no longer regarded them as Soviet citizens; instead they were traitors. The consequence, well known to the world but apparently not to the producers of *The Unknown War*, was that only a million Soviet POW's survived the war. These were forcibly repatriated by the British and the Americans. Most were shot outright by Stalin or shipped directly to Siberia; only a small fraction returned to their families. By ignoring their fate, *The Unknown War* betrays them once again, with silence.

The Soviet Union was the only country in the war whose own captured soldiers took up arms against it. Under General Andrei Vlasov, tens of thousands of Soviet POW's offered to fight the Soviet regime. Vlasov himself had been a highly-praised commander in the battle for Moscow, and later was captured near Leningrad. In the closing days of the war, the Vlasovites, as they were called, found themselves in Czechoslovakia. They tried to sur-

* *The Unknown War*, by Harrison Salisbury, Bantam Books, 224 pp., $8.95.

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render to the Americans but were rebuffed. As the Czechs were then revolting against the Nazis in Prague, one of Vlasov's divisions came to their aid, capturing the airport before advancing into the city. For a time, the Vlasov banner flew beside the Czech flag over Prague's city hall.

In his book version of *The Unknown War,* Harrison Salisbury describes Vlasov's contribution to the fighting, but the televised series, although dwelling on the liberation of Eastern Europe by the Red Army, dismisses the capture of Prague with a single misleading and untrue comment: "The Americans liberated Prague from the west and the Russians from the east." In fact, the American advance was halted at Pilsen, the agreed-upon demarcation line. Czech partisan forces, aided by Vlasov, took the city. Soviet troops were held back from Prague, as they had been outside Warsaw and Budapest, to allow the Germans time to exhaust independent partisan movements that might make trouble for the Soviets in the future.

IN ADDITION to these major distortions of the historical record, *The Unknown War* commits a number of subtle half-truths that coincide with a peculiarly Soviet approach to history. We see a young Andrei Gromyko when he was the Soviet Ambassador to Washington (from late 1943 to 1946), but we do not see the man he succeeded, Maxim Litvinov, who served as Ambassador at the height of the war. Litvinov had been the first Soviet Foreign Minister; he was sacked from that position before the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. He was Jewish and it would have been awkward for him to negotiate such a treaty. A case was prepared against him by the secret police, but the German invasion changed Stalin's mind. Only then was Litvinov sent to Washington. Now he has been consigned to the memory hole, with the help of *The Unknown War.*

An important dimension of the war that passes unnoticed concerns several small ethnic minorities, totaling about a million people, that were uprooted by Stalin: the Crimean Tatars, the Chichen, Ingush, Kalmyk, and Meskhetian peoples. The Tatars were accused of betraying the Soviet motherland. On one day, May 18, 1944, about 200,000 defenseless women, children, and infirm people were deported on trains and closed trucks to Soviet Central Asia. (The able-bodied men were in the army; the others were in labor camps.) As a result of the deportation and the intolerable conditions they encountered, over half the Tatars perished. In 1967, the Supreme Soviet cleared the Crimean Tatars of the charge of treason. Even so, they are not permitted to return to their ancestral homes. Stalin committed such acts of genocide against several ethnic minorities, in effect exploiting the wartime crisis to pursue cruel population transfers. No episode of *The Unknown War* mentions these historical events.

Other facts must be similarly too "delicate" to mention. Several of the generals who had been arrested during Stalin's purge of the army in the late 1930's were released and returned to positions of responsibility after the German invasion. The final episode shows one of them, General Rokossovsky, commanding the victory parade in Red Square. His arrest goes unacknowledged.

Another episode dwells on a little-known battle at Malaya Zemlya in the Caucasus. It turns out that Leonid Brezhnev was a political officer there. (The series never explains why political officers accompanied Red Army commanders on all fronts.) We are also treated to several minutes of Brezhev, now old, weary, and dignified, surveying the landscape of battle from a motor boat. One wonders who convinced the scriptwriters that Malaya Zemlya was a significant battle.

In its episode on the war in Poland, the show tells how Goebbels first accused the Soviets of murdering over 14,000 Polish reserve officers at Katyn forest near Smolensk. Then we learn that an investigative committee of Soviet citizens, including an army pathologist and the writer Alexei Tolstoy, with U.S. Ambassador Averell Harriman's daughter as an observer, concluded that the massacre was a German atrocity. The script, however, fails to inform the unwary viewer that every responsible Western historian regards the Katyn massacre as a *Soviet* atrocity. (The authors of the script apparently did not think to read the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam or of Olga Ivinskaya, Pasternak's companion, to examine this particular Tolstoy's credentials.)

HARRISON SALISBURY's book version of *The Unknown War* provides much information that does not appear in the televised series and would not appear in present-day Soviet accounts of the war. Air Time International, the producer of the series, controls part of the rights to Salisbury's book; the still photographs in the book are from the archive that supplied the televised series. A note inside the book refers to the TV series. So it seems fair to assume that the producers are aware of the differences between Salisbury's text and the television script. Presumably Salisbury also recognizes these differences. How then did he, the author of *900 Days,* a masterly account of the Leningrad blockade, come to be associated with a script that coincides with Soviet propaganda?

And why has the National Education Association recommended this program for high-school students?

The producers say they retained absolute "creative" control of the project, although in the February 25, 1979 issue of *Izvestia,* the Soviets announced that Roman Karmen, a Soviet cinematographer, directed the series with American help. The producers also claim that the Soviets have themselves agreed to show it to their own people in exactly the form it was produced. Hardly surprising, since from a Soviet point of view there can be nothing objectionable in this account of the war. The series does emphasize the magnitude of the conflict and the genuine suffering of the people. Only the truth has been sacrificed.

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The State of the Art

Samuel Lipman

Though in the world of pop culture fresh sounds would seem to appear with happy frequency, the central problem of serious music today is the absence of new music. Technically, of course, new music does exist. It is written everywhere, and even widely performed. These performances are, however, largely extorted under various forms of subtle and less subtle economic and intellectual pressure, and no matter how expert the performances or how well programmed the audience, the end result is the same; the music is largely unloved and soon forgotten.

Every nation, every locality, every college and conservatory, pushes its own composers. The composers prosper financially, at least on the level of physical survival; never have so many composers lived so well and been socially so secure. But this proliferation of people putting notes on paper cannot be allowed to obscure the facts of the repertory. The canon of great music was closed at least forty years ago. Those composers who were included when the curtain came down—Strauss, Stravinsky, Bartók, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich—were allowed to finish out their creative lives with pieces which, with rare exceptions, have commanded little more than a respectful hearing. For the rest, the outcome, no matter how great the ballyhoo, no matter how great the simulation of interest, is decline or, as is increasingly clear in the case of such an unmodern figure as the late Benjamin Britten, devaluation and perhaps eventual desuetude.

In this connection, it is instructive to realize the remarkable metamorphosis we have witnessed in the use of the word "modern" as it applies to music. Fifty years ago modern music was the music then being written. Now a half-century has passed, and the same music is still modern in the estimation of performers and audiences alike. And it is modern not only in the sense that it still sounds new; it is modern in the most brute sense of being as difficult to assimilate—to learn and to hear—as it was the day it was written. It must be said that young musicians who have specialized in contemporary music are indeed able to prepare this music quickly and accurately; but for their traditionally oriented colleagues, as well as ordinary music lovers, modern music remains stultified and ugly.

The effect of this problem on performers has been enormous. The absence of greatly successful new music has given added impetus to a development which began in the 19th century—the replacement of the music by the performer, of composition by performance. But in the 19th century the greatest virtuosos, like Beethoven and Liszt, and on a lower level Paganini, were also composers; in the case of Beethoven, and Mozart before him, we remember only the composer and not the performer. Even in the first quarter of our own century, the greatest pianists were composers as well—Rachmaninoff and Busoni come immediately to mind. And Kreisler, now known as a composer for his light pieces, did enrich the violin repertory.

But now great performers hardly ever write music. In the absence of the possibility of performing their own—or anyone else's—new music, even the success of the performer is beginning to seem autumnal, for the concentration on the music of the past has subjected performance itself to an increasingly academic and dutiful scrutiny. Performers, aided by records, now are more than ever concerned with what other musicians are doing; critics and audiences indulge in an orgy of comparison, searching for historical authenticity and exact recreation of an imagined past.

Recent years have seen the end of many historically important careers. Though their records live on, Arturo Toscanini and Wilhelm Furtwängler are dead, as are Pablo Casals and Gregor Piatigorsky; Artur Rubinstein, in his nineties, no longer plays, and Jascha Heifetz, fifteen years younger, is semi-retired; Vladimir Horowitz, also in his mid-seventies, continues to play a limited number of concerts, but obviously one day soon he, too, will stop. Great careers have succeeded these legends, but whether one looks at stars like Herbert von Karajan, Mstislav Rostropovich, or Emil Gilels among the older generation, or at Van Cliburn, Itzhak Perlman, or James Levine among the younger, it is plain that their careers lack the aura of universality and magic that such careers had in the past. In general, among the young, the ranks of concert and operatic artists are full of curiously interchangeable figures who seem long on stage personality and youthful charm—as well as the endurance necessary to withstand jet travel and the nerves necessary to get through under-rehearsed performances. In the will and desire to affect the course of music, today's performers appear largely lacking.

In America the present conditions of the music world take a special form. The American situation is the product, for good as well as bad, of history and economics, operating to shape more narrow musical factors. The musical history of this country is in its origin a story of early settlement by ethnic groups which were not to bulk large in the development of 18th- and 19th-century European music; added to the musical incapacities of the founding fathers was the unfortunate isolation hardly avoidable in an age of primitive trans-

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Samuel Lipman *is our regular music critic. This piece, along with many of Mr. Lipman's* Commentary *articles, will appear, in somewhat different form, in his book,* Music After Modernism, *which Basic Books is bringing out in June.*

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Atlantic communication. And after the middle of the 19th century, when immigration from societies with a rich musical life—German, Italian, and Slavic—began to take place, the initial and most creative flowering in the immigrants' homelands was mostly over.

Nonetheless, America, with its economic riches and relative ease of life for the many, did provide the opportunity for individual self-improvement and cultural growth. As can be seen from Howard Shanet's history of the New York Philharmonic, 19th-century musical life in New York, as elsewhere in the United States, both relied on immigrant musicians and faithfully followed European trends. As a result, in the orchestral field, American organizations early rivaled European groups, and by World War I American orchestras were recognized as being at least the equal of any in the world. To some extent the same was true in opera; it is still generally unrecognized just how many American singers made important and even legendary careers at the Met in the 1920's and 1930's, and just how integral these native artists were to the Met's world position in the performance of the standard repertory.

Sadly, creative contributions of Americans—composition—remained laggard. Having come late into the world of music, Americans could not boast of great composers among their national forebears; instead of following in American footsteps, our composers, as in the case of Edward MacDowell, took European models. Though Charles Ives, at the price of eccentricity, did chart a specifically native course, the history of American composition, until the late 1930's and the work of Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and Virgil Thompson, was a colonial history.

But despite the work of these three men, and the ambiguous influence of the ambivalent John Cage, the same dependency on Europe has persisted in the years since World War II. The years immediately after the war saw the influence of Arnold Schoenberg succeeded by the school of Darmstadt and post-Webernian serialism. As for electronic music, the best that can be said of it is that technology knows no motherland.

Though America may now boast practical self-sufficiency in performers, in the sense that our musical life could easily be carried on with recourse only to our own artists, Europe still remains the source of many of our most admired soloists and also the place where American artists must go to prove themselves. As a symbol of the power of Europe in our musical minds, it cannot be forgotten that Van Cliburn —perhaps the most publicly successful of all our performers—made his great career on the basis of Soviet blessing in the Tchaikowsky Competition of 1958. On a musically more significant level, we find today few American conductors at the head of our major orchestras; indeed, of our most important orchestras, only Cleveland has an American-raised conductor, and that conductor, Lorin Maazel, made his career entirely in Europe prior to being chosen by Cleveland. It is true that James Levine, the music director and principal conductor at the Metropolitan Opera, is an American by both birth and training, but surely that job is at least as much administrative as artistic. Among instrumentalists there are honorable exceptions to the rule of European primacy, but these exceptions, as in the case of a young American pianist whose signing by a major American record company was publicized as the first by that company in over a decade, gain visibility by the very fact of their rarity.

The one area where American artists have made world careers in sizable numbers is singing. Here American artists have excelled, and furthermore have been credited at home for their achievements. It is hardly a detraction from their success to remark that, on the highest level of artistic fame—that of becoming spokesmen for the works they perform—they have been handicapped by the fact that their great roles have been in works written in European languages and coming out of a past European culture.

STILL, despite certain handicaps, there is obviously a highly developed musical life in this country. We have an unprecedentedly large number of orchestras ranging from small, only semi-professional community efforts to the five or six virtuoso groups of our largest and most important cities. At the professional level, the musicians involved are better paid, both in absolute and relative terms, than ever before. And we are regularly told that audiences keep getting larger every year. Alas, if a high rate of activity were all that were needed, an observer might perhaps be forgiven for questioning the spectral character of these famous audiences; for example, our newspapers and mail give palpable evidence of the extraordinary effort in advertising currently being made to attract customers and induce them to sit still long enough to be counted. That these efforts have sometimes, at great cost, succeeded—not only in the area of orchestra concerts but also in the growth of chamber music and regional opera—cannot obscure the enormous stress being placed on sheer numbers as a reason for the existence of musical activity.

But the solo recital, that backbone of music for the last century in its unrivaled ability to gain listeners for masterpieces through experiencing them under the impact of idiosyncratic personalities, seems to be in a moribund state. The two mainstays of solo careers—concert series in small cities and towns and at colleges and universities—have increasingly been filled by group and pop attractions. Helped along no doubt by the widespread feeling that the number of performers capable of filling large halls has dwindled, this change has been spawned by the search for larger audiences in order to justify new halls and public support.

ACADEMIC musical life itself presents a complex picture in many ways difficult to evaluate but in any case depressing. Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of college music departments across the country, staffed often by incompletely prepared graduate-school products and the embittered products of our higher music schools, understand that the only thing it is widely possible to do with music professionally is to teach it. Music, no less than other branches of the human-

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ities, has become a kind of self-perpetuating educational pyramid scheme. But the price of all such schemes is sudden contraction. Recent years have seen just such a possibility, with the almost total extinction of new jobs. What jobs there are seem reserved for the beneficiaries of affirmative action. Since what was said about Supreme Court Justices applies almost as well to professors with tenure—few die and none resign—all too often, the few lucky candidates find themselves circulating from one low-level position to another, rather than entering the normal course of academic preferment.

Moreover, the proliferation of contests—supposedly a democratic method of choice, although in fact its highest development has taken place in Eastern-bloc countries—to allocate the available careers in performance has become little less than obscene. Not only do major contests often not do what they are supposed to do—that is, deliver careers—but they have lent themselves to shameless exploitation by their sponsors as a cheap means of getting publicity at little more than the cost of press consultants, the printing of applications, and the travel expenses of a few circuit-riding judges. Though the eventual winner does receive a cash prize, much of his real compensation is in the form of concert engagements which would otherwise have been commercially filled in any case by young and inexpensive artists. And it must not be overlooked that the real raw material of contests, indeed the real underwriter of the whole process—the contestant—is free of cost to the sponsor.

NOR does the recording business present an encouraging picture. Not only is classical music responsible for no more than one out of twenty records sold in this country, but this percentage may actually be dropping. The inevitable result is that increasingly the American record market is the preserve of the great European giants, secure in their own domestic markets. These companies, among which are Decca (London in this country), Deutsche Grammophon, EMI (Angel here), and Philips, have in recent years begun to record American orchestras, thus filling the vacuum left by the voluntary withdrawal of American firms—RCA and Columbia—from the classical market. Though Columbia at least has fought an honorable retreat, it is left now with an exclusive arrangement with only one American group: the New York Philharmonic.

Also important is the nature of the repertory and the choice of the artists in large-scale projects of big American companies. Significantly, the pieces for the most part are either tame or trite; when they are not trivial, interesting items are usually recorded in Europe—sometimes with a smattering of American artists—and only released here. The one exception to this caution might have been Pierre Boulez's recordings of 20th-century music with the New York Philharmonic for Columbia; but it is difficult not to feel that the lack of commercial prospects for such recordings was merely one more factor in Boulez's unsung departure from the New York—and the American—scene.

Though high recording costs are usually cited as the chief reason for the dearth of American recordings of serious music, the root cause must be the lack of an American market for classical music in general, and for American recording products in particular. Though one can hardly say that this lack is anything new—it goes back at least to the very beginning of electrical recording in 1925, and probably to the start of phonographic recording of the classics almost eighty years ago—the fact that it is still present in the time of our supposed cultural maturity does raise serious questions about the future of the industry.

THEN there is a problem seldom mentioned in serious discussion of the condition of music but of genuine influence, and that is the problem of the managers and agents. There is no space here for a full discussion of commercial management. Suffice it to say that, like Gaul, it is divided roughly into three parts, consisting of one colossus, three celebrity booking services, and a largely ineffective group of small independent operators. As a whole, this group of operators seems doomed to continue forever in a frantic search for yesterday's successes. But whether their successes are yesterday's or tomorrow's, the result of this concentration of effective power in the hands of a few management firms is an increasing ability to promote careers by fiat—fiat determined as often as not by personal whim rather than musical merit or, surprisingly, audience success. For young and poorly paid artists, this mode of organizing the commercial field in which they must ply their art can have a devastating effect.

BEYOND the plight of individual artists is that of today's concert- and opera-producing institutions. Here the efforts of musical organizations are directed toward increasing the size of their audiences not simply as an end in itself, but more importantly as a means of convincing patrons—whether private, quasi-public, or governmental—that the activity in question is worthy of support.

Now obviously patronage—and on a scale far exceeding the mere buying of a ticket or even repeated subscription to a series of concerts or operas—has always been a necessary feature of musical life. Aristocratic patronage, responsible for so much great art, was replaced in the 19th century by the contributions of the emergent middle class, though as late as the 1870's Wagner was able to complete the *Ring* and get Bayreuth started only through the lavish support of mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. In this century, the beneficent effect of merchant money on American music may be seen in the relationship between such men as Otto Kahn and the Metropolitan Opera, Clarence Mackay and the New York Philharmonic, and Augustus Juilliard and the music school named for him. Or, to take another example, in the much more intimate environment of San Francisco, an entire generation of Jewish philanthropists of German origin created northern California musical life in its own image.

Now such philanthropy is dying, if not dead. The nexus between music and the merchant classes has been broken, at least in the particular case of the individual patron. Not only does publicly

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manifested love of music no longer serve as an easy means of upward social mobility, but the rich are wary of courting public disfavor through conspicuous expenditure, even for culture. Nor can more strictly economic factors be ignored in the decline of private large-scale support; increases in taxation and the resulting difficulty of forming, keeping, and transferring huge fortunes have taken place at the same time as the costs of musical enterprises have risen dramatically. But whatever the reason, private support has been swamped by the rise of foundations and latterly by the appropriations of the government itself for culture.

The enormous increase in such support in recent years is so well known that it requires no documentation here. All that needs to be said is that government support —federal, state, or local—has become indispensable to the present organization of the arts. Evidence for this statement may be found in the regular and predictably demeaning appearances of artists and administrators before those official bodies responsible for appropriating funds. And beyond such unlikely love feasts, there are all sorts of signs of the extent to which arts organizations must now devote their time to the devising of plausible grant requests and the preparation of endless bureaucratic forms.

The immediate danger arising out of the relation between music and the government is not so much that it breeds the possibility of direct political control—though it must be admitted that a recent statement by the Vice President's wife, quoted in the New York *Times,* is worrisome: "Politics in the arts? . . . That's human nature. Politics exists when human beings get together in an organized way." And the *Times* goes on to attribute the following thoughts to unnamed "White House aides":

> . . . expenditure of federal funds in a democracy must necessarily reflect political forces. These are the facts of life, they argue. They also say this is the way things should be: Those whose funds are used have a right to have some say in how they are spent.

Still, real and obvious political meddling in the arts would be both too risky and too inefficient. What is more dangerous than that, because it already exists, is the tendency federal funding encourages of cutting the artistic suit to fit the financial cloth. This has always been a factor affecting the artist's decisions about what to work on, but it has gained immediacy from the centrality of the government's new funding role, coupled with the timidity of private donors unwilling to support activities lacking official sanction.

Evidence for this state of affairs is hard to come by, if only because of people's normal reticence in these matters. But every aspiring musical organization—and every aspiring musician—is aware of the number of times government officials have made it clear in advance of any application that there happens to be or happens not to be grant money available for some project. Of course the project in question may be undertaken regardless of the possibility of a grant; conversely, the project may be one which would have died even if money had been forthcoming. But no musical organization can escape the recognition that as far as the struggle for survival is concerned, the existence or nonexistence of money for a particular project becomes the reason for that project to be picked up or dropped.

WHAT I have discussed above applies to the country as a whole. But it may be of special value to examine how the present condition of music is reflected in New York City, not only the capital of American music but also one of the major platforms of world music. How this great city is responding to the present pressures can serve at the same time as a case history and example—and, if necessary, a warning.

In addition to the city's being the commercial center of the music business, New York's musical institutions are made up of opera companies, orchestras, concert series, and schools. On all sides we are told that this is a golden age of culture in New York City. But in point of fact, wherever we look, the signs are ominous, disguised in the best-financed cases by tinsel, in others by mere hope, but overall betraying depression, pessimism, and even in some cases a touch of panic.

At the top of New York's musical ecology in glamor, publicity, size of both budget and audience, and perhaps even artistic achievement, stands the Metropolitan Opera. Presently under the management of three men—a music director, a production director, both in turn presided over by an executive director —the administration of the Met remains without public strain. Not only has this troika pushed the wolf from the door in the past few years, it has, after a somewhat shaky interregnum following the retirement of Rudolf Bing, restored orderly procedures, most notably in casting. It has also succeeded in bringing the Met before the local and national public by means of a publicity effort unparalleled in the world of serious music.

Even if the Met has enjoyed major gains in the stability of its very existence, however, this undoubted achievement has gone hand in hand with a continuing shortage of artistic excitement.

On the level of repertory, the Met has substituted a recycling of the Romantic past for any pretensions to discovery of the future or even some reflection of the musical present. While the singing remains close to the highest international level, the conducting lacks either the capacity to stir an audience in performance or the kind of imagination in musical conception which renders individual efforts memorable. It is significant that the greatest interest in conducting at the Met during recent seasons was occasioned by the 1978 appearance of the then eighty-three-year-old Karl Böhm in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* of Richard Strauss; but Böhm was already a major conductor more than forty years ago, and his successors—at least as far as the Met is concerned—are nowhere in sight. Paralleling the routine nature of much of the conducting, productions, both in execution and conception, have played it safe intellectually and artistically, hewing largely to the smartly traditional.

And over all lies the worry about long-term financial prospects. Caught between the vastly increasing costs of singers, orchestral mu-

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sicians, non-musical personnel, and administration on the one hand, and the increasing difficulty of securing support from the largest individual givers on the other, the Met has gone public in two senses: it is seeking out the small giver and the government. It is difficult to believe that small givers can, in the long run, do very much more than cover the enormous cost of their solicitation. But building a wide contributing public is of the greatest importance in enlisting government support, and is in today's political world a more persuasive argument for state and federal backing than any artistic case which can be made. And however much trouble the Met is having in raising money, it is clear that nowadays it is doing better than anyone else, a success produced by its reputation, the solidity of its performances, and the quality of its board.

IT IS instructive, at the same time, to look at how its colleague on the plaza at Lincoln Center, the New York City Opera, is doing. Here the situation is grim. Though the difficulties of the New York City Opera present themselves at this moment as financial, it is clear that at the root of the City Opera's condition is a crisis of artistic function. Performance levels of this company continue much as they have in the past—splendor of execution has never been the *raison d'être* of the company. Its function —and the reason for its secure place in operatic history—has in the past been its introduction of new operas by contemporary composers, and its American presentation of unfamiliar works of the past known to connoisseurs but ignored by the Metropolitan. In this area, not only has the Met become more adventurous in its revival of older operas, but the supply of viable new works has ceased. Neither the public nor even enlightened opinion has shown any interest in the expensive and difficult undertaking of performing contemporary opera.

Thrown back as a result upon the mounting of familiar works done better by the Met, the City Opera finds itself faced by the same economic problems which confront every other musical institution—but without the public image and inner confidence that can only result from a sense of artistic purpose. A recent disturbing sign was the decision of Beverly Sills, its most famous singer and a product of the City Opera, to retire from her musical career and become a co-director with Julius Rudel, the company's director since 1957. It was immediately speculated that the marriage would be uneasy and therefore short-lived. And as if in confirmation of these speculations, it was announced at the end of 1978 that there would be no co-directorship; Miss Sills was to become sole director as of June 30, 1979. It was plain that dissatisfaction with Mr. Rudel was the reason for his partial, and now for his total, replacement. It remains unclear what serious purpose, other than publicity and spectacular fund-raising, can be served by bringing in a famous diva without administrative or non-singing musical experience to run as notoriously complex and tricky an organization as an opera company. Whatever happens will no doubt happen quickly, for it has already been suggested in the press—in a perhaps officially inspired article—that the only hope for the City Opera lies in the federal government.

WHILE New York still has two resident operatic organizations, it has only one full-time orchestra. The Philharmonic is rich in history, musical capacity, and financial backing. Under its last music director save one, Leonard Bernstein, it was publicly successful in concert, on recordings, and on television in a way new to it. The Philharmonic's experience under Bernstein's successor, Pierre Boulez, has made it clear that as far as commercial prosperity is concerned, intellectual stimulation and a sense of discovery, no matter how much honored, are no substitute for show-business glamor in the performance of the familiar 19th-century repertory.

As an orchestra, the players now possess, as a result of their experience (chiefly under Boulez), an unrivaled ability to prepare quickly the most ambitious and *outré* new music. But not only is this music unattractive to any audience outside New York's many music students; concentration on this music's difficulties has in the past served both to coarsen the tone of the orchestra and to deprive the group of the time necessary to rehearse the standard repertory by which it will inevitably be judged.

To this not dishonorable predicament must be added the discipline problems produced by the sheer number of conductors who are marched before the orchestra for short periods in order to fill its year-'round season, and even more importantly the fact of playing in an acoustically imperfect hall. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Philharmonic's new music director, Zubin Mehta, to woo the audience in ways never open to Boulez, the orchestra remains in trouble, exchanging some of its morale and performance problems for diminished intellectual prestige and loss of musical interest.

The closest New York has come to having a second orchestra has been the American Symphony, the successor in the city's musical life, via the Symphony of the Air, to Toscanini's NBC Symphony. A self-governing organization composed of freelance musicians, it has had as its major activity an annual series of Sunday afternoon concerts in Carnegie Hall. Despite its pride in self-governance, the orchestra has long been hampered by indifferent conductorial leadership, stemming in part from its democratic structure and in part from its inability to pay either soloists or conductors. It has also, in an attempt to attract an audience, often chosen weak, overfamiliar, or actually meretricious repertory. Despite its recent appointment of the talented Sergiu Comissiona as music adviser, the combination of democracy and poverty is bound to leave it something less than a true, full-time second orchestra.

ANY discussion of concerts in New York outside those of the New York Philharmonic involves consideration of the current status of local halls. There are, in principle, two kinds of concerts presented: full orchestra and large group attractions, and solo recitals and chamber-music groups. It is also

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necessary to distinguish between rental attractions in which the hall management assumes no financial responsibility for the event, and those events which the auspices—usually but not always the hall management—itself produces for its own account; it is the latter with which I will be concerned here.

One major concert sponsor—the Hunter College Concert Bureau—is no longer in existence. For a decade, from the early 1960's to the early 1970's, it was the major presenter of celebrity solo recitals in New York City outside Carnegie Hall; in addition, it was becoming an important presenter of chamber music. It had been founded during World War II as a limited platform for a few star events catering to a sophisticated audience swelled by the influx of European refugees. Though it eventually became the home of many well-attended brilliant series for both traditional and moderately avant-garde tastes, the coming of the urban and the student troubles in the late 1960's made Hunter College an inhospitable place for such outside culture, and college administrators were both unwilling and unable to support the concerts financially. By the mid-1970's, the operation had been drastically cut back and soon was entirely liquidated.

But another institution continues to sponsor concerts, as it has for the last generation: the Metropolitan Museum, though limited by the small capacity of its Grace Rainey Rogers auditorium and by a certain reserve in programming, presents valuable concerts to an audience very much its own. Part of the slack caused by the demise of the Hunter series has been taken up by a revival of music at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA, but here, once again, a too-small hall restricts the size of the audience, and in addition exigent financial pressures seem to require more celebrity events as well as more artist-sponsored and rental concerts than might seem desirable for the highest musical—as opposed to performing—interest.

It is clear that on the recital level, as everywhere else in New York music, the center of gravity has shifted to Lincoln Center. Mention has already been made of its three large performing musical institutions, the Metropolitan and New York City operas, and the New York Philharmonic. In addition, the past decade has seen an enormous expansion of Center-sponsored recitals and concerts by visiting orchestras at Fisher (formerly called Philharmonic) Hall, the home of the Philharmonic. And the smaller hall of the Lincoln Center complex, given by and named for Alice Tully, has quickly become the venue of choice for the largest number of concerts paid for by the artists themselves. Tully Hall has also become the home of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the most prestigious small resident performing group in the United States. Tully Hall is also being integrated into the large and commercially successful Great Performers at Lincoln Center series, which is still based in the much bigger Fisher Hall.

Lincoln Center now combines both the major attractions and the desirable halls of New York City musical life. As if to set a public seal on its triumph, the 1977-78 and 1978-79 concert seasons saw the emergence of Lincoln Center on publicly-sponsored television as the proud presenter of the Metropolitan, the Philharmonic, the City Opera, and such superstar soloists as Luciano Pavarotti. Whatever the musical value of these programs—European television productions still seem more elegantly conceived and better performed—there could be no denying either the massive publicity campaign which supported these productions or the large size of the viewing audience.

In New York City itself, Lincoln Center's rise in the last two decades has marked a revolution in the places New Yorkers go to hear music. Prior to this rise, the Met had performed in its old house near Times Square; the Philharmonic had been resident in Carnegie Hall since 1892; the City Opera was located in the old City Center on West 55th Street behind Carnegie; and the major hall for recitals and small groups was the acoustically extraordinary Town Hall, also near Times Square. Of these buildings, the Old Met has been torn down; the old City Center presents only dance; Town Hall's reprieve from the wrecker's ball, achieved through a planned shift to presumably more commercially viable theatrical attractions, remains in doubt; Carnegie Hall, having lost the New York Philharmonic and not having as yet found a real replacement, is in trouble over booking, finances, and administration—and all this despite recognition of its superior acoustics.

Indeed, the condition of Carnegie Hall, losing orchestras and soloists, audiences, and public-relations prestige to the newly renovated Fisher Hall, is merely another sign of the centralization of musical life at Lincoln Center. Better financed, more intelligently run, Lincoln Center is able to coordinate its bookings and its massive publicity campaigns. Should Carnegie Hall, as now seems possible, become either a straight rental house putting on ever fewer of its own productions or even be closed altogether, New York City will in essence end up with one large concert hall, one opera house, one orchestra, one major opera company (in the case of the City Opera's either folding or becoming an all-American producer of potboilers and novelties), and one small prestige recital hall—all at Lincoln Center.

In this connection, it is necessary to examine another of Lincoln Center's constituents, the Juilliard School. Though Juilliard also trains actors and dancers, music undeniably remains the school's most important educational area. Founded in the 1920's as an elite graduate school, it became larger in the 1940's through merger with the Institute of Musical Art. Its closest competition was the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, founded (also in the 1920's) by the Bok family and long associated with Josef Hofmann. For many years, of the two schools, Curtis had a slightly superior reputation; but despite being led during recent years by Rudolf Serkin, Curtis entered upon a long and slow decline. Today, with Serkin gone, it seems badly weakened. Juilliard, on the other hand, at first under the presidency of William Schuman (later president of Lincoln Center for several years) and now under

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Peter Mennin, has gone publicly from strength to strength.

Now securely occupying the position of premier music school in the United States, and perhaps in the world, Juilliard possesses magnificent physical facilities, a famous faculty of instrumental and vocal teachers, and its pick of the most talented and ambitious students. It has a brilliant record of turning out sparkling young musicians with relatively easy access to solo careers. At the present time, only its opera program has not shared in the general acclaim; these lavish productions have failed to find general favor in the critical press. But as far as instrumentalists are concerned, Juilliard has the field pretty much to itself.

And yet, lurking just behind this striking achievement lies the question which today plagues schools everywhere, distinguished and undistinguished alike: music education for what? Short of audience success, it would seem that Juilliard, for all of its excellence, has found no other answer than to replicate the Moscow or St. Petersburg conservatory in the heyday of Russian music around the turn of the century. This kind of education—perhaps best described as play-or-perish—emphasizes the star system, public favor, and the assiduous imitation of models selected from among the major successes of the past.

The concentration on emulation in performance is coupled with a neglect of the world outside the teacher's studio and the concert stage. In line with what an old teacher of mine used to say—reading is bad for the hands—Juilliard education includes no more than the most perfunctory attempt to relate music to art, ideas, and life. This failure to develop the minds of the very bright students the school attracts may have been acceptable at a time when the future of music was secure in the hands of composers capable of writing viable new music; to handicap young people today, by sending them into the world equipped only with curatorial skills, is to relegate music to the status of an object in a museum.

If Juilliard has the problem of finding a purpose to accompany its present success, the problems of New York's two other major music schools are more immediately grave. Both the Manhattan School of Music and the Mannes College of Music are said to be in financial trouble, lacking either the musical distinction or the remarkable access to philanthropy of Juilliard. Rumors and press reports of conflicts and difficulties have swirled about both schools. Recently their merger was contemplated, then abandoned. In any case, despite individual excellences at each school, neither has been able to become publicly visible or to attract the most highly qualified students; like other American music schools, but more embarrassingly because they are geographically so close to their competition, they move very much in Juilliard's wake. Barring some unexpected turnaround, their future is bleak indeed.

THE final element of New York's musical life is its critical press. Here the story is unfortunately a short one, for without doubt only one review now counts—that of the New York *Times*. There are other local reviews, chiefly those appearing in the New York *Post* and *Village Voice*. But as is also the case with the limited coverage of the weekly magazine *New York*, reviews outside the *Times*—regardless of their actual content—share in their papers' failure to find a consistent musical readership willing to act at the box office on the basis of their critics' recommendations.

In past years, the situation in New York was quite different, for there then were many newspapers, each with its devoted musical readers; among these was not only the *Herald Tribune* with Virgil Thomson, but also the *World-Telegram* with Louis Biancolli and the *Journal-American* with Miles Kastendieck. But now, for all practical purposes, New York is a one-newspaper town. It is here—not in any specific objections to *Times* policy or personnel—that the problem lies.

The power this monopoly confers on the *Times* reviews is twofold. Musical events which are not covered in its pages all too often remain non-events, and those that are covered are inevitably subject to the tastes and the specific competences of one person. To the *Times*'s credit, it has endeavored to provide a high standard of disinterested writing, and in this attempt it has succeeded far beyond the achievements of almost all other American newspapers. Yet there remain important differences among the individual writers the paper employs, and as a result the judgment rendered on any one concert often impresses a knowledgeable listener as the outcome of a lottery.

And beyond the reviewing function, one misses in the *Times* any sustained, reflective, intellectually serious consideration of music both in the long run and in the wider world. This is a kind of critical work more difficult than the identification of trends or the expression of nostalgia for a vanished Romanticism. It is basically an attempt at understanding the permanent intellectual significance of musical events by placing them in a context of culture and society outside music. Though the *Times* makes this effort in art, and even to a limited extent in literature, in music the paper's staff seems more concerned with what a recent article called "the hottest ticket in town."

THE purpose of this *tour d'horizon*—of the country in general and of New York in particular—has not been to denigrate music and musicians, or even the institutions which exist to support the art. It has been to describe in the cold light of day, rather than in the hot flush of professional optimism, a situation at once uneasy and confused. A further purpose has been to make clear that the problems of music are vastly more than financial, and that increased support, although desirable, cannot by itself cure the internal problems of an artistic enterprise. It is our besetting sin as a nation to think that money can solve all problems—human exploitation, poverty, unhappiness, and even the shortage of new music. It is not so, and the punishment for believing in nostrums is the same in music as elsewhere: frustration, disappointment, bitterness, and anger.

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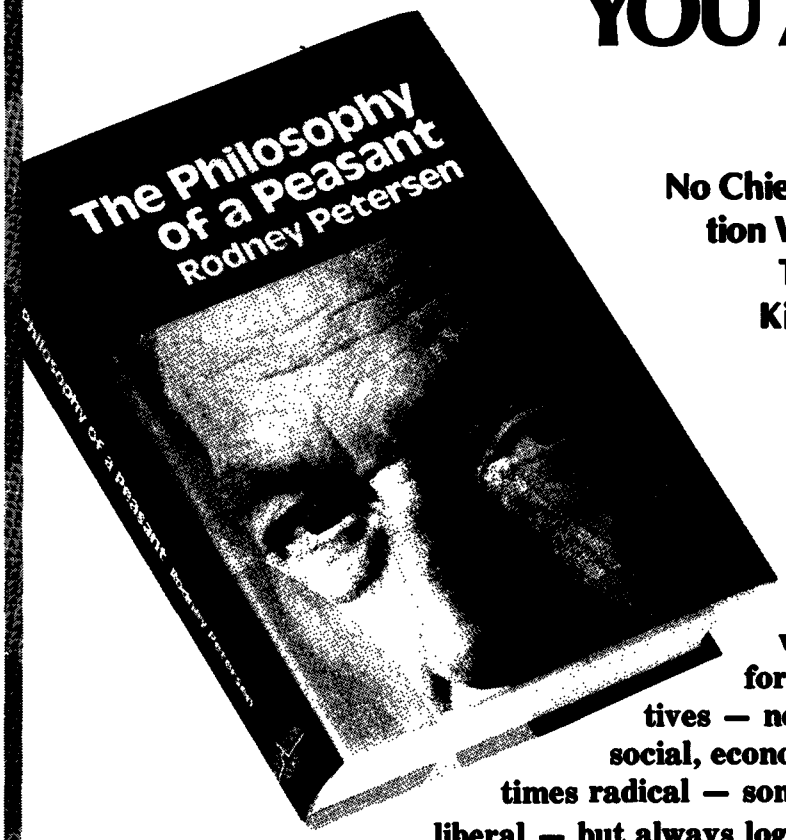

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Books in Review

Fairy Tale

KING OF THE JEWS. By LESLIE EPSTEIN. *Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. 350 pp. $10.95.*

Reviewed by RUTH R. WISSE

I. L. Peretz, the dominating figure of modern Yiddish literature, has a story called "Stories" in which a struggling young writer finds himself between two conflicting literary aims. To win the affection and quell the anti-Semitic distrust of a Polish seamstress, the writer composes entertaining fairy tales that earn him an occasional kiss. To express his own guilt and rage as a Jew he imagines stories of national import: a dead Polish child whose body has been concealed in a Jewish home before Passover is discovered by the Wonder Rabbi and ordered to be eaten by the guests, so that when the pogromists break in the door, the planted evidence is gone. Peretz's aspiring author is suspended between the desire to charm an ignorant or hostile audience and the need to mourn a tortured past. But that was in another country. In contemporary America, there are writers who set out confidently to combine the two aims.

One such effort, Leslie Epstein's novel, *King of the Jews*, is loosely based on events in the ghetto of Lodz under the German occupation of World War II. The Lodz ghetto was liquidated in August 1944, with the same thoroughness as all the other Jewish ghettos of Poland, but its almost five-year duration was exceptional in many ways. The Jewish worker population of Lodz, center of Polish industry, became the nucleus of the largest "labor ghetto" under Nazi rule. The great productivity of the ghetto, especially as a source of textiles and manufactured goods for the German Wehrmacht, encouraged the belief that its economic usefulness would guarantee its survival. This belief was systematically cultivated by the Germans through the man they appointed as leader of the Jewish Council, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, who justified his autocratic rule by claiming that his pitiless efficiency would avert a much harsher fate.

The last of all the ghettos to be destroyed, in a city that remained otherwise intact, Lodz ghetto preserved the largest collection of material about its wartime history, including buried caches of photographs, diaries, documents, and eyewitness accounts. This archive has been supplemented in the ensuing decades by dozens of memoirs and autobiographical novels, leaving the researcher and historian with a greater well of information than any other destroyed Jewish community was able to bequeath.* Epstein's novel makes selective use of this material.

Although its central character, I. C. Trumpelman, is based on the actual chairman of the Lodz *Judenrat*, and though the book's descriptions of the local conditions derive from documented ghetto history, *King of the Jews* does not attempt a historical interpretation of either the ghetto Elder or of the ghetto itself. The book bears the same relation to the Holocaust as *M*A*S*H* does to the Korean war. Its flat caricatures, cabaret style of narration, and stylized theatrical staging for all the main events of the plot belong to the category of farce. Like other American war farces, Epstein's book isolates the moral *angst* of the situation from the historical conditions in which it originated: from the aggression of totalitarian regimes or, in this case, from the articulated program of genocide. True evil seems not to be a suitable subject for this genre. Thus the Germans, under euphemistic designations, remain outside the "problem" of this book, which concentrates on the destruction of the Jews as an internal Jewish matter. To use the kind of fairy-tale analogy in which Epstein delights, this is like the story of Red Riding Hood, but without the wolf. The wolf's lurking presence is admitted as part of the atmosphere, but the real subject is the credulity of Red Riding Hood, and the nature of her guilt in directing the wolf to granny's door.

The book's main thematic concern is with what the jacket copy calls the "excrutiating moral dilemmas" of those charged with executing German orders, and of those not so charged whose initiatives had still to be weighed against the threat of collective reprisal. To dramatize this moral plight of the Jews, the book is studded with relevant debates: on *Judenrat* membership as a privilege or right; on the strategy of appeasement versus rebellion; on the right to sacrifice a minority to save the majority; on the relative merits of labor and sabotage; on the relative morality of murder and suicide. There is even a debate (whose literary antecedent is in André Schwartz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*) on whether children being deported to their death should be lulled with bright dreams or told that "Oswiecim is the homeland of the Jews." Hannah Arendt's thesis of the banal inflexibility of the totalitarian mind during the Holocaust seems to have found its corollary in this presentation of the hyperactive Jewish moral imagination. But the debates, which include many classical ghetto arguments culled from various Holocaust anthologies, are phrased in snappy one-liners that make the "excruciating moral dilemmas" of the Jews sound like entries on a multiple-choice exam.

Had the novel engaged any of the issues it raises, it might have risked literary significance, for Epstein is a professional and engaging

RUTH R. WISSE *teaches Yiddish literature at McGill University and is the author of* The Schlemiel as Modern Hero *and* A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas.

* See "How Rumkowski Died" by Michael Checinski, beginning on p. 63 of this issue.—ED.

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writer. But instead, the author has approached his subject with the deliberate naiveté of Dennis the Menace, and with a boyish nihilism that reduces the Jewish tragedy to a hollow metaphysical joke. The book's narrator is the key to its small success and larger failure. Presumably a survivor himself, this narrator speaks with touching intimacy about "our town," lingering over familiar landmarks with unforced authority. At the same time, he assumes the currently fashionable pose of the literary impresario, offering his audience a tale he cannot undertake to judge: "It is possible that everything would have happened just as it did, even if there hadn't been a terrible strike and even if the Elder had never arrived. Ladies and gentlemen, you decide." The idea that a ghetto survivor, in the face of his own remembered experience, would be subject to this degree of doubt about its meaning is an unintentional bit of farce at the author's expense. Such temporizing can only be the product of a tender, untried American imagination, masquerading as a "survivor" with about the same success as a child dressed up in his father's clothes. (It is also hard to trust a "survivor" who makes four mistakes in two quoted lines of Yiddish.)

THIS novel is narrated by a neutered survivor about a neutered people it calls the Jews. The family, which looms largest in authentic memoirs of the ghetto and is inevitably the source of the most wrenching pain, appears in this novel only in distorted and corrupted form. The book's characters are orphans, or representative types—the rabbi, the rich man, the thief. Lacking intimate bonds with one another, they move atomistically through the novel, arousing little compassion in one another, and even less in the reader. This book has been widely praised: perhaps critics have found it a relief to read about the destruction of people one has never been asked to care much about in the first place.

The Jewish polity is yet more seriously misrepresented. From the chaotic images of Jewish organizational life, one would never guess that the Jews were a people with a long history of communal survival, and that the Jewish political strategy of the ghetto had evolved through many centuries with not inconsequential success. The book's most conspicuous omissions are of Zionism, as both ideal and actuality, and of the secular and religious culture in which the Polish ghettos were steeped. Among Jewish political parties only the Bund and the Communists are mentioned, as though the author had deliberately expunged those elements of Jewish cultural and political life that have survived the Holocaust to give the lie to its finality.

PERETZ's failed author, cited at the outset, balks at the scene of cannibalism he has had the courage to imagine but not to recreate. Here Epstein's book provides a telling contrast. It introduces a "Cannibal Woman" who has eaten her dead child. This woman is sub-

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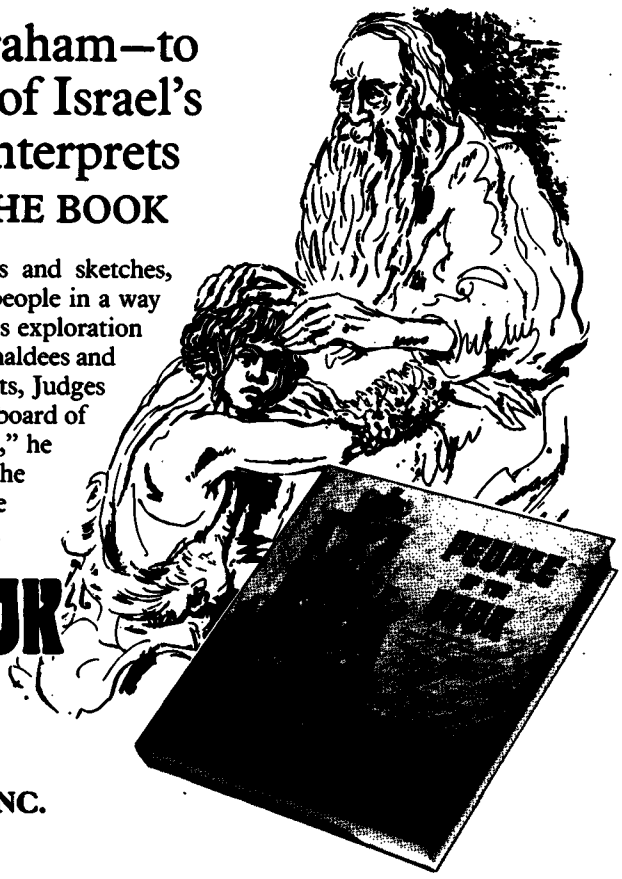

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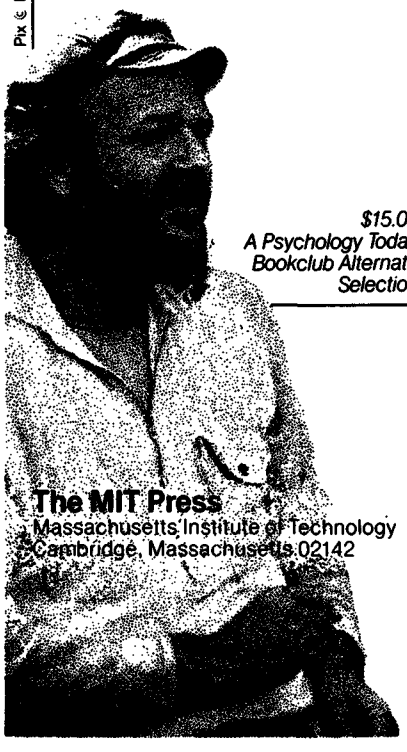

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sequently cleared of the charge—it turns out she only made use of the dead child's ration card—but not before the shock value of Jewish cannibalism has been repeated and exploited. At its worst, this book is not loath to titillate with a subject that surely demands either the courage of mature exposition or dignified suppression.

Elephants & Mothers

ANYONE'S DAUGHTER. By SHANA ALEXANDER. *Viking. 541 pp. $12.95.*

Reviewed by KENNETH S. LYNN

As a journalist, Shana Alexander has never been able to separate her private self from the public events and figures she has covered. Clowns, baseball games, catastrophes, and celebrities, she says, have always been "mixed up with *me*." No previous event, however, had ever evoked the kind of personal recognitions that the Patty Hearst affair was to do. While listening to her car radio on a California freeway early in March 1974, a few weeks after the kidnapping, Mrs. Alexander was suddenly smitten by the conviction that the story of the heiress's disappearance was "*my* story," because even from the outset it was apparent that some sort of mother-daughter struggle was involved. Patty was not only the "girl I had been," she was Kathy, "my own daughter," who also was estranged from her mother, and who two years later would run away from prep school while Mrs. Alexander was covering Patty Hearst's trial for bank robbery.

One would think that, having connected Patty's and Kathy's rebellions, the conflation-prone author of *Anyone's Daughter* would have gone looking for the similarities between Patty's mother and herself, but the animus of the book makes it clear that this was one identification Mrs. Alexander had no interest in making. For if there is a villain in her recapitulation of the Hearst case, it is not Field Marshal Cinque, or F. Lee Bailey, or even the FBI, it is Catherine Campbell Hearst. Even Mrs. Hearst's handsome appearance is held against her. The fact that she was once the belle of Atlanta merely leads to a vindictive comparison between her "hard-edged" good looks and Scarlett O'Hara's; the "impossibly white-toothed smile" she flashes is likened to a Wrigley's gum ad; in its vacuous perfection, her blonde "façade" is "the Platonic ideal of Lana Turner made flesh." As for Mrs. Hearst's character, no denunciation of it is too reckless for Mrs. Alexander to repeat. Thus an interview with William and Emily Harris in *New Times* magazine, in which the two surviving members of the Symbionese Liberation Army assert that in her revolutionary days Patty had described her mother as a "pill freak" and "family buffoon" who never cooked or did anything else for her husband and five daughters, is quoted at length. Yet Mrs. Alexander has made no effort to verify the charges, a failure which becomes all the more appalling in the light of the testimony of Patty's ex-fiancé Stephen Weed that Patty had a capacity for sarcasm that was unrivaled in Weed's experience, and of the generally recognized fact that the Harrises were dedicated to the propagation of political lies.

Part of Mrs. Alexander's attitude toward Mrs. Hearst is simply cultural snobbery. The Hearsts lived in Hillsborough, California, a fashionable suburb largely inhabited by politically conservative Roman Catholics of Irish descent whose wealth is "old" only by West Coast standards. The mere recital of these details is sufficient to arouse Mrs. Alexander's liberal self-righteousness. With sweeping contempt, she dismisses the residents of Hillsborough as vestigial peasants, "a vanished social 'missing link' between the bog and the bourse, surviving behind the high hibiscus hedges in darkest country-club country." At the heart, however, of the author's feelings about Patty Hearst's mother lies her unresolved antagonism to her own "domineering, seemingly unloving, constantly guilt-evoking mother." At times, Mrs. Alexander seems on

KENNETH S. LYNN, *whose books include* The Dream of Success *and* Visions of America, *teaches history at Johns Hopkins.*

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the verge of recognizing this fact. When, for example, she learns that Patty was raised under the supervision of a governess who beat her with a hairbrush and told her that her parents had not wanted her, she exclaims that as a child she, too, had been "abandoned" by her mother to a cruel German governess who had never allowed her to play with other children in Central Park. Yet if the author is conscious of the direction of her thinking, she never understands where it finally takes her. *Anyone's Daughter* is a book which settles two scores at once. Piling one filial rage upon another, Mrs. Alexander takes up the public vilification of Patty's mother where Patty's SLA tapes leave off, and she brings to her task a capacity for sarcasm undreamed of in Stephen Weed's philosophy.

BLINDED by hatred, Mrs. Alexander is incapable of seeing any resemblances between herself and the woman she is attempting to destroy. Nevertheless they exist, and they are extremely important. When Mrs. Alexander learns during the trial that her own daughter has disappeared, she says, "I have no idea why Kathy has run away." She also seems to have no idea why Kathy had developed into such an unhappy child in the course of living with her mother after her parents' divorce; or why Kathy screamed when her mother came to see her after the police had found her and she had gone to live with her father and stepmother; or why Kathy said, "Don't touch me, Mother," after she stopped screaming and her mother reached out to her. At one point in the book, Mrs. Alexander wonders whether she "ever had the capacity to raise my mysterious daughter," but the question does not lead to any sort of judgmental review of her conduct. While *Anyone's Daughter* is breathtakingly hard on other people, it resolutely protects its author. Not even the story about the elephants enables Mrs. Alexander to connect her shortcomings as a mother to Mrs. Hearst's.

One day during the trial, the author had lunch with Dr. Jolyon West, one of the psychiatrists retained by the Hearst defense, and they quickly discovered a mutual passion for elephants. Dr. West was interested in learning whether the sex hormones of male elephants are chemically similar to LSD. Mrs. Alexander, for her part, was proud of having been the literary midwife to and biographer of the first elephant ever born in the United States, a blessed event which she had described in detail in the pages of *Life* magazine. "It happened," she chatters on, all unconscious of what she is revealing, "when Kathy was less than a year old, a time when my own interest in motherhood was at a personal and professional peak." Even before her daughter's first birthday, in short, Mrs. Alexander was once again pursuing her career. This interesting fact takes us directly back to the Hearst case.

At the time of the trial, Catherine, the eldest of the Hearsts' five daughters, was thirty-five years old. A polio victim as a child, she had spent most of her adult life as a semi-reclusive invalid. After Catherine's birth, the Hearsts had no children for ten years. Then came

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what was in effect a second family. Ginna was the first-born; four years later, Patty arrived; the very next year, Anne; and finally, after two more years had passed, Vicki. The intervals reveal—albeit not to the psychologically naive Mrs. Alexander—that the newborn Patty had the attention of her mother for a far shorter period of time before the distracting arrival of a younger sibling than either Ginna or Anne did, and that Vicki never had to contend with a younger rival. Like Mrs. Alexander's daughter Kathy, Patty seems to have "lost" her mother at a very tender age, and in neither case was the loss a temporary phenomenon. What arrangements Mrs. Alexander made for the care of Kathy, after her interest in motherhood passed its quickly achieved "peak," she does not say, but in Patty's case we know that until she was nine she was governed by the governess with the hairbrush, that she was then passed on to the tender mercies of the nuns who ran the astonishing number of schools she attended, and that she rebelled against the discipline of all these surrogate authority figures with the same kind of ingenious disrespect for the truth which once built an empire of yellow newspapers. (I have to be excused from the exam, Patty told one of the nuns; my mother has cancer.)

Mrs. Alexander asks herself whether the tragedy of Patty's conversion to urban terrorism and ultimate conviction for bank robbery could have happened to her daughter, and her answer is, yes. When she says that, however, her attention is totally fixed on the nightmarish image of a runaway teenager. She has forgotten the episode about the elephants, as well as all the other emotional deprivations which she must have inflicted upon her daughter. The same sort of flaw marks her discussion of the other young women in the SLA. Mrs. Alexander correctly points out that these suicidal psychopaths did not come from helter-skelter backgrounds, as the Manson women did. They were products of the middle or upper-middle class. Their parents, Mrs. Alexander argues, were "supportive." Unfortunately, the author reaches this conclusion without the slightest knowledge of what the mother-daughter relationship had been like in the formative years of the SLA women's lives.

THE Hearst case was a drama with many layers of meaning. It involved the sexual and political attraction between ghetto revolutionaries and disaffected suburbanites; it displayed the greed and stupidity of lawyers and the vanity and lack of common sense of psychiatrists; it reminded us—as if we needed reminding!—of the salaciousness of the American press and of the violence of American police. Nevertheless, Mrs. Alexander's conception of the case as essentially a story about Patty and her mother—and, by extension, about other American daughters and their mothers—seems exactly right to me, and I lament the fact that she has botched the job of presenting it. For if the story had been properly told, it would not only have illuminated the past, but might have helped us to find our way in the years ahead, by initiating a much-needed national discussion about the proper care of young children. The women's-liberation movement, to its eternal discredit, has simply finessed the issue, while child-care experts in the universities who assure us that there is no theoretical reason why day-care centers cannot adequately serve *in loco parentis* persistently refuse to address themselves to the problems of implementation. Meantime, the owners of private day-care centers continue to report serious managerial difficulties having to do with rapid turnovers in staff personnel and inadequate facilities for handling those children in the group who are mentally disturbed. As for the idea of creating vast numbers of lavishly financed public facilities, it seems to have died a-borning in an inflation-haunted era.

With every passing year, more and more working women are electing not to take prolonged leaves of absence from their jobs and remain at home in the early years of their children's lives. The decision is understandable, in a sense, but is it not fraught with the risk of pathological fury? A more penetrating book than *Anyone's Daughter* might have compelled us to debate this vitally important matter.

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The Civil War in Spain

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION. By BURNETT BOLLOTEN. *University of North Carolina Press. 644 pp. $29.00.*

Reviewed by JOSEPH SHATTAN

THE Spanish Civil War engaged the passions of an entire generation of European and American anti-fascists. Driven, as they themselves have testified, to the edge of despair by the unchecked spread of fascism, they rallied to the defense of the beleaguered Republic, whose cause, it seemed to them, was indistinguishable from the cause of liberty itself, and whose fate, they believed, presaged their own. Defending the Republic became a moral imperative of the Left, a "duty," in Hemingway's words, "toward all the oppressed of the world."

When the Civil War broke out in July 1936, Burnett Bolloten, a very young British journalist working for United Press, was sent to cover it. Fiercely pro-Republican, and determined to write a book about the war, he began collecting documentation. Eventually, Bolloten amassed more than 100,000 periodicals, 2,500 books, and hundreds of unpublished documents. He also found his true vocation: to write the definitive history of the Spanish Civil War, a task which has occupied him for forty years now. In the course of his exhaustive inquiries, however, Bolloten's views underwent a considerable change, so that when his first book, *The Grand Camouflage,* was published in 1961, it shocked the European Left. His current study, a monumental and compelling work of scholarship, is equally disrespectful of venerable leftist orthodoxy.

It is Bolloten's contention, which he buttresses with an enormous mass of documentation, that the Nationalist rising of 1936 marked the effective demise of the liberal Republic. The army, the police force, and virtually the entire administrative corps of the state went over to the Nationalist side. "Shorn of the repressive organs of state," Bolloten writes, "the liberal government . . . possessed nominal power, but not power itself, for this was split into countless fragments and scattered in a thousand towns and villages among the revolutionary committees. . . ." The liberal government, presided over by Manuel Azaña, whose high ideals quickened the hearts of Western liberals, was simply a façade, maintained solely in order to garner Western support.

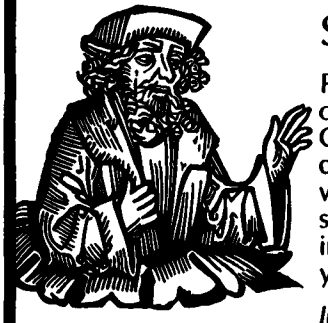
The main promoters of revolution, especially in the rural areas of the Republic, were the anarcho-syndicalists, Spain's classic revolutionaries. Animated by a quasi-religious fervor, sustained by the sacred texts of Bakunin and Sorel, the anarcho-syndicalists seized the opportunity provided by the shivering of the Spanish state to expropriate the manufacturers and tradesmen in the towns and to collectivize peasant holdings

JOSEPH SHATTAN *is a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford.*

Philo of Alexandria

An Introduction

SAMUEL SANDMEL



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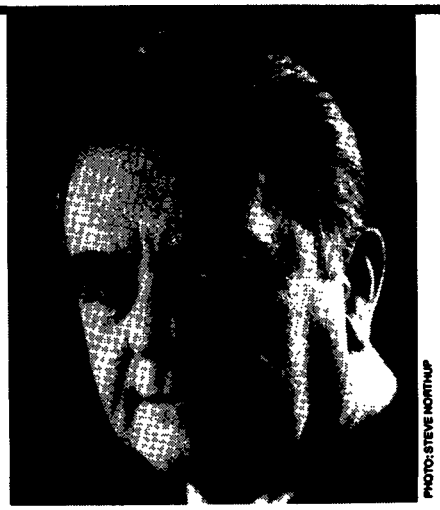

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in the countryside. Their particular animus, though, was directed at the Catholic church, which they regarded in much the same way as the pious Christian regards the Anti-Christ. Hundreds of churches and convents were gutted or put to secular use, and thousands of members of the clergy and religious orders were murdered by the anarcho-syndicalists in the wake of the Nationalist revolt.

While the anarcho-syndicalists were a dominant force in the revolutionary committees, their principled opposition to the state prevented them from taking part in the national government. No such scruples encumbered either the Spanish Socialists or the Communists, who, along with the Republicans, formed the Popular Front coalition whose electoral victory in 1936 precipitated the rightist rising. Of the two "proletarian" parties the Socialists, initially, were by far the stronger, with 89 deputies in the Spanish parliament to the Communists' 16. But the Socialists' real power was not nearly so decisive as their numbers suggested, for the party was bitterly riven. While the party executive was in the hands of the moderate or Center faction, the powerful Socialist Labor Federation was led by Largo Caballero, the leader of the party's left wing. Caballero scorned the moderation of the Popular Front's electoral program and openly declared himself in favor of a dictatorship of the proletariat. In the tense situation which ensued upon the Popular Front's victory, Caballero's ostentatious display of radicalism was extraordinarily ill-timed, and may have helped to provoke the rebellion.

Unlike the warring Socialists, the Communists were bound together by an iron discipline, and they made adroit use of their nominal ally's discord. As a former member of the politburo of the Spanish Communist party put it, "One day we supported one man against the other; the following day we did the reverse, and on all occasions we incited [the Socialists] against one another so that they would destroy themselves, a game we played in full view and not without success." The object of this "game," for the Communists, was to win control of

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the Republic and to place it at the disposal of Joseph Stalin, who, at this time, was playing his own complicated diplomatic game.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, Stalin concluded that a German attack on the Soviet Union, supported either openly or tacitly by England and France, was a very real possibility. To forestall the emergence of such a powerful anti-Soviet alignment, Stalin pursued two mutually contradictory policies simultaneously. On the one hand, he tried to forge an anti-German alliance with England and France; on the other hand, as early as 1936, he began putting out discreet feelers for an alliance with Germany. Although his overtures were rebuffed time and again by all sides, Stalin was nothing if not persistent, and in the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War he saw yet another occasion for putting his designs into effect. As General Walter Krivitsky, who headed Soviet military intelligence in Western Europe until his defection in 1937, revealed in a book published in 1939: "Stalin believed it possible to create in Spain a regime controlled by him. That done, he could command the respect of France and England, win from them the offer of a real alliance, and either accept it or—with that as a bargaining point—arrive at his underlying steady aim and purpose, a compact with Germany."

THE means by which Stalin gained control of Republican Spain are described by Bolloten in the most amazing detail. Essentially, Stalin's *modus operandi* consisted of placing loyal agents in key positions in the secret police, the army, and the defense ministry, all of which were gradually reconstituted under the watchful eyes of Soviet "technicians." As the sole purveyor of arms to the Republic (the British and French refused to aid either the Republicans or the Nationalists, even though Germany and Italy had intervened openly against the Republic), Stalin was in an excellent position to secure compliance with his demands, which were often quite specific. Bolloten quotes a left-wing Socialist deputy who described how the Soviet Ambassador to Spain, Marcel Rosenberg, "used to carry in his pocket a collection of notes couched in the following or similar terms: 'It would be expedient to dismiss X, chief of such and such a division, and replace him by Z'; . . . 'It is necessary to imprison M and bring him to trial for disloyalty,' and so on, ceaselessly." While many of Stalin's appointees were Communists or philo-Communists, a good number were either ambitious careerists, eager to do anything to get themselves ahead, or victims of Communist intimidation, who sought to avoid the punishments—ranging from defamation to murder—which the Communists meted out to recalcitrants. Under these circumstances, the Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists were easily outmaneuvered, and it was not long before "the spontaneous, undirected terror of the [anarcho-syndicalists] in the heyday of the revolution had given

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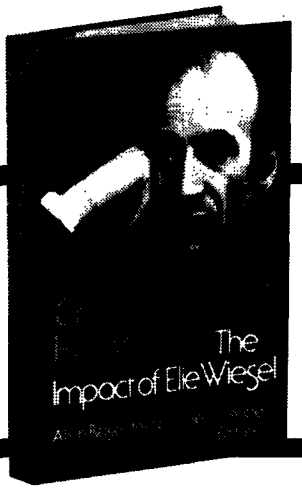
Edited by Alvin H. Rosenfeld and Irving Greenberg



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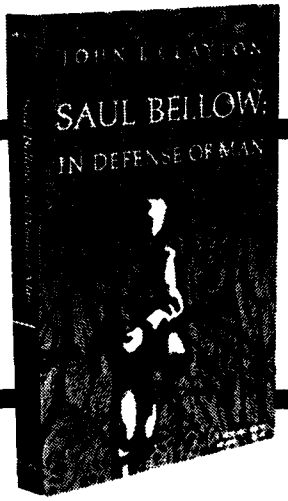

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way to the more sophisticated, centrally directed, and, hence, more fearful terror of the Communists."

And yet, even as the Communists were in the process of converting the Spanish Republic into a Soviet province, they went to extraordinary lengths to camouflage their objectives, and to maintain an image of statesmanlike moderation. "We are fighting for the democratic Republic," declared Santiago Carrillo, who currently heads the Spanish Communist party, and who in 1937 was the leader of the party's youth section. "There are some who say . . . that we are practicing a deception, that we are maneuvering to conceal our real policy. . . . Nevertheless, comrades, we are fighting for a democratic Republic, for a democratic and parliamentary Republic. This is not a stratagem to deceive Spanish democratic opinion, nor to deceive democratic opinion abroad." In fact, of course, Communist emphasis on the democratic nature of their aims *was* a stratagem designed to mask the secret communization of the Spanish state and to gain the support of the Spanish middle class and the sympathy of the West. Interestingly enough, the head of the Comintern's Latin section, who was dispatched to Spain to oversee the policy of deception, was Palmiro Togliatti, later appointed head of the Italian Communist party and nowadays regarded as one of the patron-saints of "Eurocommunism."

THE defeat of the Communist-dominated Republic by the Nationalists is a theme which Bolloten has wisely deferred for a future volume. In this study he has confined himself to a meticulous description of "the double policy of public conservatism and secret communization" (the phrase is Hugh Trevor-Roper's) by means of which the Spanish Communist party transformed the Republic into a Stalinist satrapy. It is a policy which Communist parties have applied ever since. In postwar Czechoslovakia, for example, Klement Gottwald, the head of the Czech Communist party, and the future President of the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia, renounced the dictatorship of the proletariat and pledged that Czechoslovakia would take the democratic route to socialism. Even as he said this, however, his followers were consolidating their control over the ministries of *interior, national defense,* and *information,* which were of inestimable value to them in their subsequent *coup d'état.* Similarly, in Italy today, while the heirs of Togliatti trumpet their "principled" support of the democratic state, the Italian Communist party maintains its relentless drive to communize the *police, the army, the unions,* and the media. Indeed, "Eurocommunism" in general may be defined as the effort to transform the essence of the "bourgeois-democratic" state while leaving its outer forms intact.

This "double policy" was perfected by the Communists during the Spanish Civil War, and, for this reason alone, the inner history of that conflict is profoundly significant. We are in Burnett Bolloten's debt for telling it so magnificently.

The Literary Marketplace

DEMOCRACY AND THE NOVEL: POPULAR RESISTANCE TO CLASSIC AMERICAN WRITERS. By HENRY NASH SMITH. *Oxford. 204 pp. $13.95.*

Reviewed by ELLEN MOERS

WITH HIS 1950 study, *Virgin Land,* Henry Nash Smith won a permanent welcome on the shelves of readers who want and somehow still hope to find unusual, lively, and significant criticism of American literature. In that book, Smith discussed two opposing ideas of the trans-Mississippi frontier that alternately enticed and repelled expansion into the subhumid prairies of the West: the idea of the "Garden of the World," and the idea of the "Great American Desert." He blended serious literary work and the evidence of popular culture—circulars and ads—into a fascinating and responsible critical narrative. After *Virgin Land,* two fine studies of Mark Twain appeared, keeping readers

ELLEN MOERS, *author of* Literary Women *and other books, most recently* Harriet Beecher Stowe and American Literature, *is at work on a comparative study of English and American 19th-century literature.*

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eager for Smith's next general work. The publication of his new book, challengingly entitled *Democracy and the Novel*, has been greeted with enthusiasm by the reviewers, but it does not fulfill the promise of its title.

THE classics of American fiction that emerged in the mid-19th century did not come out of nowhere. Since the late 18th century, Americans had been writing and selling novels in the modes of Richardson, Edgeworth, Godwin, Austen, and other English authors. Scott and Dickens had made America a nation of novel readers, had even created our publishing industry and opened up our inland waterways for the distribution of the immensely popular pirated English wares. But the work of Hawthorne and Melville, which burst upon the Anglo-American literary scene in the 1850's, was strikingly original, and there is surely a case to be made that a prime factor in that originality was the impact of democracy on the American novel.

By 1825, when Melville was six, Hawthorne twenty-one, and Dickens thirteen, manhood suffrage was substantially the rule in our Northern states, forty years before anything of the sort was achieved in England. American intellectuals became a race of politicos, talking, grasping, breathing the quotidian atmosphere of democracy—literal democracy, rule by the people. The historians Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager have evoked the all-pervasive democratic ambience which in the early 19th century enveloped American lives from cradle to grave, from parlor to statehouse, from tavern to capitol, and made American intellectuals different from their British contemporaries:

> In contrast to its British prototype . . . the American party became tri-dimensional, functioning not only in federal but in state and municipal elections. . . . The newer state constitutions . . . transferred many offices from the appointive to the elective class . . . sheriffs and justices of the peace, heads of executive departments such as the state-treasurer and attorney-general, even judges of the higher courts, were now elected by the people. . . . Furthermore, these constitutional changes were effected [by] a popularly elected constitutional convention, with a popular referendum on the result. The most noted statesmen were elected to the state conventions, the people took a keen interest in them, and voted intelligently on their work.

Hawthorne's entire career was affected by his friendship at Bowdoin with a college classmate, Franklin Pierce, who would be a Democratic President of the United States. Others of his classmates would be Senators, Representatives, judges, cabinet members, governors. Among them were two black men who became governors of African colonies. And Bowdoin College, it should hardly need pointing out, was no Oxford, and no Harvard.

Put a man like Hawthorne, temperamentally a recluse and aristocrat, into the hurly-burly of American democracy and something of a literary breakthrough will result. This, I believe, can be shown from the text of *The Scarlet Letter* itself. As for the long obstreperous essay Hawthorne set at the head of the novel, "The Custom-House," this fixed his stance as a new species of writer—one who, in the world's only democracy, was "made happy, at monthly intervals, with a little pile of glittering coin out of his Uncle's pocket," who sought shelter "under the wing of the federal eagle," and who coped "with the customary infirmity of temper that characterizes this unhappy fowl."

Indeed, long before 1850, Washington Irving had used Rip Van Winkle to show what it was like to be a democrat in post-colonial America. Rip comes down from the mountain, having slept through the Revolution, to find George Washington rather than King George painted up on the tavern sign, and a crowd of village politicians:

> The very character of the people semed changed. There was a busy, bustling, disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquility. . . . A lean, bilious-looking fellow, with his pockets full of handbills, was haranguing vehemently about rights of citizens—elections—members of congress—liberty—. . . . The orator bustled

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up to him and . . . inquired "on which side he voted?". . . . Another short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm, and rising on tiptoe, inquired in his ear, "whether he was Federal or Democrat?" Rip was equally at a loss to comprehend the question. . . .

UNFORTUNATELY, none of this political matter interests Henry Nash Smith. The excitement promised by his title, *Democracy and the Novel*, is drained by his dreary subtitle, "Popular Resistance to Classic American Writers," which returns us to the stalest of clichés about American literature: that the absence of an aristocratic elite and the presence of a philistine mass public made life difficult and art unprofitable for the American writer. This is hardly what the word democracy implies.

There was nothing new—in America or anywhere in the 19th century—in the striation of the reading public into those who wanted the best, the mediocre, and the trashy; there was nothing distinctively American in the popular craving for sensation, sentiment, piety, uplift, humor, and melodrama, which affected every mid-19th-century writer from Flaubert to Dickens (and in the case of the latter, fired up much of his genius). Yet Smith sets out to prove that the runaway sales of a few unworthy American novels crushed the originality, diminished the quality, and blighted the careers of the best American writers. If the thesis could be proved it might hold some interest; but it seems to bore even its author. In desperation he resorts to the latest fashion in academic circles: the pursuit of a single villain on whom everything that was wrong with American society and debilitating in American thought can be blamed. The villain in this case is Woman, and particularly the phenomenon which has recently come to be labeled the "feminization of American culture."

In the 1840's and 1850's, Woman wrote *Jane Eyre* (to which *The Scarlet Letter* was compared when it appeared three years later). Woman also wrote *Mary Barton*, and *Consuelo*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and sold *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Lamplighter* in hundreds of thousands of copies—thus provoking Hawthorne's outburst about a "damned mob of scribbling women." American women also took over a leading public role in the abolitionist movement, and began to fight seriously for the vote. Now, it would be onerous but not impossible to demonstrate that both Hawthorne and Melville, like their male contemporaries in England, recognized the formidable mid-century rivalry of writing and thinking women, and that their work was affected thereby both for good and for ill. It would be very difficult, but worth a try, to show that the sharp and niggardly practices of some Yankee publishers pushed our best writers away from the hard work of letters and toward the easy temptations of the spoils system of American democracy. Instead of doing either of these things, Henry Nash Smith offers critical essays on a variety of novels, ill-assorted as to quality and period: *The Scarlet Letter, Moby-Dick*, H.W. Beecher's *Norwood*, Howells's *A Modern Instance*, *Huckleberry Finn*; and two strong chapters on Henry James's lifelong effort to manipulate the literary marketplace. He has not written about democracy and the novel.

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A Liberal Conservative

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS AND OTHER SOBERING THOUGHTS. By GEORGE F. WILL. *Harper & Row. 320 pp. $10.95.*

Reviewed by MARC F. PLATTNER

GEORGE F. WILL is unquestionably America's finest political columnist. Anyone who doubts this judgment may easily confirm it by turning to Will's recently published book, *The Pursuit of Happiness and Other Sobering Thoughts*, a compilation of more than 100 short pieces that previously appeared in *Newsweek* and the Washington *Post*. The political column is generally not a literary form that long

MARC F. PLATTNER *is on the staff of the Twentieth Century Fund.*

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endures or that readily bears consecutive reading. Even the most diligent academic researcher would be hard-pressed to make it through more than three or four old columns of, say, Tom Wicker or Evans and Novak. It is a remarkable tribute to Will's gifts that one can effortlessly and pleasurably read as many as fifteen or twenty of his articles at a single sitting, and remain eager to return to the rest.

Will has aptly identified what distinguishes him from most of his fellow practitioners: "I have made it an aim of my life to die without ever having written a column about which presidential advisers are ascending and which are descending. I write about the 'inside' of public life in another sense. My subject is not what is secret, but what is latent, the kernel of principle and other significance that exists, recognized or not, inside events, actions, politics, and manners." Will proves adept at locating and illuminating this kernel of significance in the most varied range of subjects—from Hubert Humphrey to Elvis Presley, from the Supreme Court to the Chicago Cubs, and from Churchill's rhetoric to the Howard Johnson's menu. Yet he rarely falls victim to the ponderosity that afflicts so many journalistic pundits. His wide learning and keen insight are leavened by a light touch and a graceful style.

But George Will's claim to our attention extends beyond his literary skill and interesting sensibility. This collection of columns, he asserts in the introduction, presents the "contours" of a "coherent conservative philosophy." Although those who are scrupulous about the use of the term "philosophy" may find this claim a bit inflated, there is no doubt that Will displays a distinctive and thoughtful political outlook that is worthy of serious consideration.

The easiest approach to the complex task of defining the character of George Will's conservatism is to begin by indicating what it is not. For he not only directs his most caustic attacks against the political heroes of many American conservatives—Spiro Agnew, George Wallace, Richard Nixon, Robert Dole, the House Un-American Activities Committee—but also clearly rejects the two dominant strains of the contemporary American Right, populism and libertarianism. He speaks with evident distaste of the "constituency of resentment" cultivated by right-wing populists like Agnew and Wallace, and manifestly shows no trace of the nativist bigotry that has often been associated with this movement. Moreover, though he occasionally attacks the excesses and inanities of federal bureaucrats, Will is not given to indulging in generalized anti-Washington rhetoric or to hinting that "the people" are being victimized by some elitist conspiracy. Indeed, he argues that a major failing of government today is that it has become *too* responsive, stimulating endless popular demands that it cannot possibly fulfill.

AT THE same time, Will is far from agreeing with those libertarian conservatives who want government to do as little as possible. While acknowledging the free mar-

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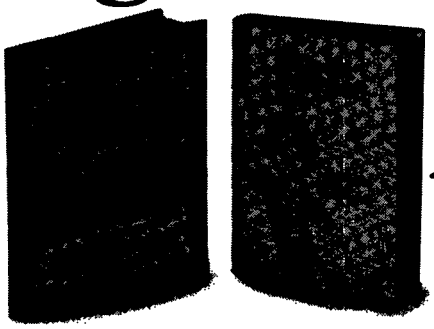

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ket's "remarkable ability to satisfy the desires of the day," he insists that government "exists not merely to serve individuals' immediate preferences, but to achieve collective purposes for an ongoing nation." Hence he is not afraid to assert the propriety and the necessity of the state's sometimes overriding—for the sake of the common good—the consumer preferences expressed in the marketplace. Similarly, he argues that government cannot be indifferent to the ways in which its citizens choose to pursue their own happiness, but must provide legal support for certain "essential values."

This brings us closer to the positive core of Will's conservatism. A favorite aphorism of his, repeated several times in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, emphasizes the connection between "statecraft" and "soulcraft." In a free society, he argues, the statesman must be concerned with the souls of the citizens, because "self-government presupposes certain character traits, including moderation, reasonableness, discipline, and other attributes of mind."

But these needed character traits are undermined, according to Will, by the dynamics of our capitalist economy, which "produces—indeed requires—a constant increase in consumption, and in appetites." He takes American conservatism to task for having "uncritically worshipped" these free-market forces, despite the havoc they have wrought upon local attachments and traditional ways. When he speaks in this vein, expatiating on the evils of "commercial society," Will sometimes sounds as if he belongs to the tradition of European reactionaries who would like to repeal the modern world. But notwithstanding his evident nostalgia for certain aspects of the past, it would be a serious error to consign him to this category.

FOR George Will is not only a sincere friend of American liberal democracy; he is also an astute enough thinker to recognize that the commercial spirit, and the economic growth that it fosters, are essential to the success of the American system. He understands that it is above all the poor who would suffer from policies that would result in a slowing of economic growth. More generally, he realizes that liberal democracy "has existed rarely, and only during the two centuries of rapid economic growth in the West. It probably has been made possible by that growth, by the belief that a rising tide raises all boats, a belief that dampens the worst social conflicts." And on a still deeper level, he is aware that the American polity itself, as definitively explained by James Madison in *Federalist 51*, is premised on the acceptance, if not the encouragement, of individual self-seeking.

Will rightly points out, however, that there is a tension between this teaching of Madison and the view that he expressed in *Federalist 55*: "As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form." The burden of Will's conservatism, then, is not so much to disparage the pursuit of private happiness and economic well-being as to insist that a nation devoted to this pursuit cannot remain free unless it also cultivates and conserves "other qualities in human nature." In short, he reminds us of what the liberal democratic tradition has too often ignored or taken for granted —the "cultural prerequisites" of a free society. In this respect, Will's conservatism—if that is the proper word for it—calls to mind the thought of Tocqueville, a writer to whom he (surprisingly) never refers.

The Pursuit of Happiness contains very little in the way of specific policy prescriptions. George Will does not have the temperament of either a tinkerer or a zealot. (Indeed, at times he seems inclined to a highly pessimistic—not to say fatalistic—view of the future of American democracy.) Moreover, he knows that the moral and cultural problems about which he is most concerned will not easily yield to legislative remedies. Nonetheless, he defends the principle of employing legal proscriptions against such threats to public morals as pornography and the use of "recreational drugs." And he clearly believes that our political leaders must do what they can to shore up those institutions (like the family) and moral standards that prevent a civilized society from degenerating into a mass of purely self-regarding individuals.

A generation ago it was easy for liberals to dismiss such concerns in their zeal to combat the evils of bigotry and intolerance. But today there is growing reason to believe that the gravest threat to the individual freedom that liberals cherish comes not from the Mrs. Grundys of this world but from the erosion of those moral habits and beliefs that hold together a free and self-governing country. Many liberals may thus find themselves prepared to give a fresh hearing to the arguments of a humane and intelligent writer like George Will—even if he calls himself a conservative.

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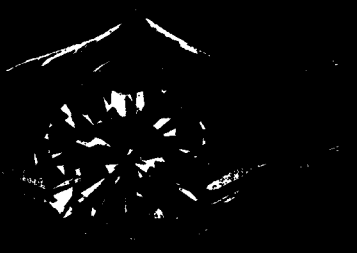
The diamond solitaire.



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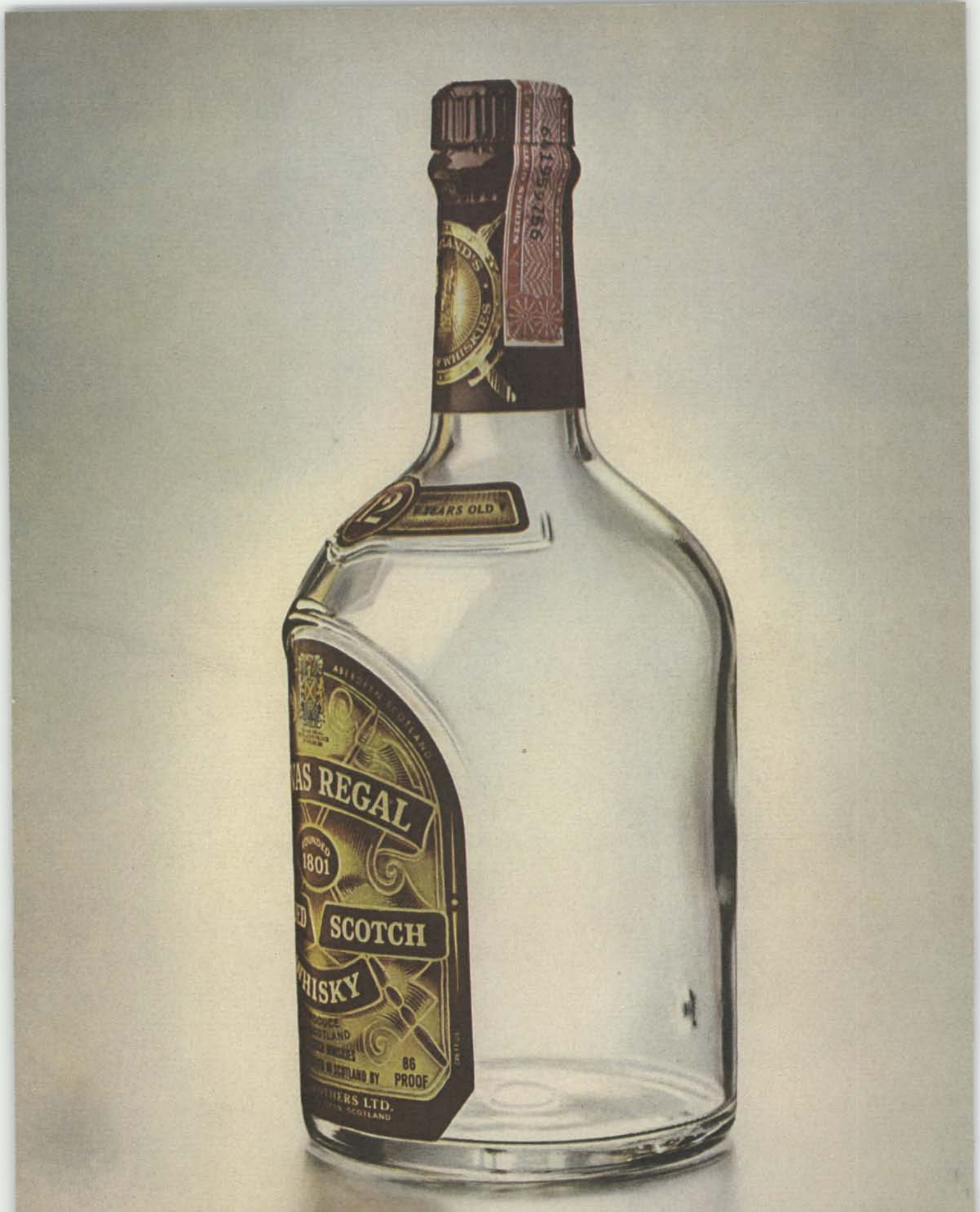

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